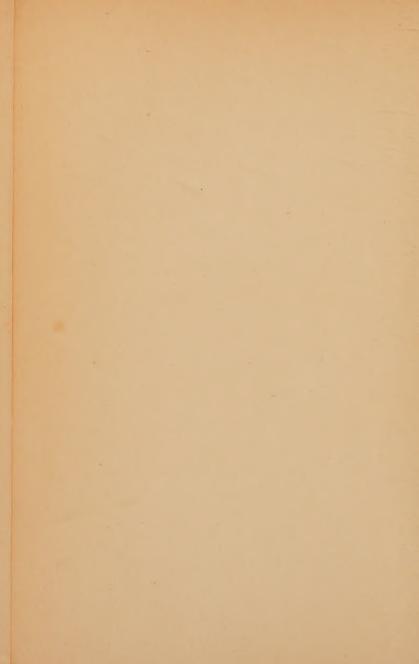
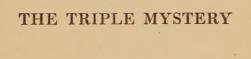
THE TRIPLE MYSTERY ADELE











THE TRIPLE MYSTERY

BY

ADELE LUEHRMANN

AUTHOR OF "THE CURIOUS CASE OF MARIE DUPONT,"
AND "THE OTHER BROWN"



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To

WALTER KIESEWETTER

In appreciation of the pleasure and profit derived from my study of music with him, and in acknowledgment of the suggestion that led to the writing of this story.

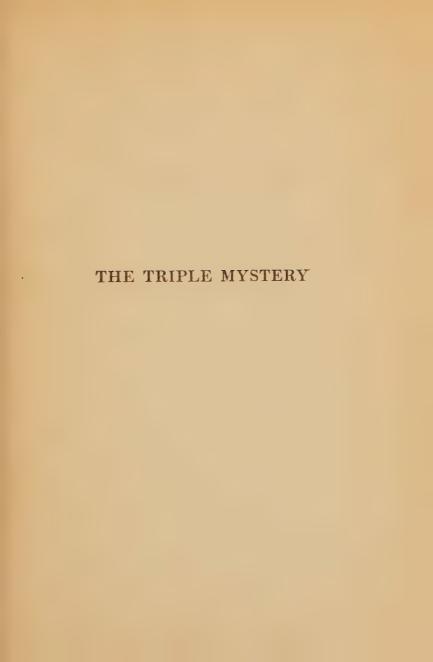


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THE TRIPLE MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

QUID PRO QUO

LIVE Thrace had been announced to Zarady by the doorman, and now as she crossed the stage to where he stood her heel-taps must have been plainly audible to him; but it was not until she had reached his side and waited there in silence for a moment that the great man stirred.

As he looked up from the sheet of music in his hand the girl's lips opened, then closed again without a sound having passed them. Their eyes were on a level, for he was tall, and his, black and full, narrowed until only a malicious gleam escaped between the lids. Deliberately then he sent his glance down her slender figure and back again, noting each detail of her shabby appearance.

"I've come to accept your offer," she announced with nervous abruptness, stiffening under his scrutiny.

The Hungarian's black brows lifted. "Really?" he murmured in exaggerated astonishment, frowning the next moment because his insolence wrought no change in her set face.

"That offer was made a year ago," he went on in a cold, snapping tone. "Where have you been since then? What have you been doing? Trying to get on without me, eh? Trying everything?"

"Yes."

"You have wasted a year. You have been a fool."

She made no reply to this. Her grey eyes were as before quite steady and emotionless.

"Where have you been singing?"

"In a church."

The conductor of the famous Panharmonic Orchestra made a noise in his throat, expressive of his extreme contempt.

"I had some concerts-small affairs, of

course-" began the girl.

"Of course!" He cut her short. "I told you it would be so. I warned you. And I warned you against church singing."

"I had to live."

"And have you lived?"

His glance swept her figure again significantly, but again he drew no fire from her. It was as if she held her face between them like a mask, so immobile was it.

"You have been a fool," he repeated. "Admit it." And when she still kept silence, "If you won't admit it why are you here?" he demanded.

"Because I need money."

At the unflattering baldness of her answer he gave her an angry glare, which she took unflinch-

ingly. And in the pause that followed, while they stood with eyes locked, it was his gaze, not hers, that first wavered. From his swarthy chin to the line of his thick black hair a flush mounted, his shoulders twitched, his hands moved toward her. But before they had touched her he jerked them back to his side.

"I'll hear you sing," he said harshly, turning away. "That is," he flung back contemptuously, "if you can sing anything besides hymns."

He crossed to a piano that stood open nearby and motioning her to a position facing him sat down and began to play. Instantly every other sound on the stage ceased. The members of the orchestra, who had been chattering noisily, in half a dozen different languages, while putting away the music and instruments used in the rehearsal just ended, interrupted these activities to listen or continued them soundlessly.

"Sing this—if you know it," ordered Zarady, passing from aimless modulations into the prelude of a song, a composition of his own. He had given Olive Thrace a copy of this song more than a year ago, but he doubted that she had ever taken the trouble to learn it and expected to embarrass her by forcing her to admit that she had not.

She had already opened her coat and thrown back its worn fur collar to free her throat, and her only response to his taunt was to assume the conventional concert pose and look over his head into the empty auditorium beyond. The tenseness of her face relaxed and her eyes softened as she surrendered herself to the mood of the music.

Her voice was soprano, of a lovely lyric quality, finely trained, and though Zarady's setting of the immortal poem that she sang was worthy neither of the words nor of her she probably raised it as far above its level as the art of interpretation could, a fact that no listener there more keenly realized than the composer himself. As he played he stared into her face, his eyes and ears as absorbed as if the fingers that moved over the piano keys had been those of another person.

With head high and lips parted she maintained the ecstatic mood in which the song ended through the concluding bars of the accompaniment; then as the final chord died away she dropped her eyes with eager, girlish questioning to his, forgetful for the moment of everything save that he was a master-musician, the leading orchestral conductor in America, a critic whose approval the most accomplished singer might well covet.

He met her glance for an instant only, then sat motionless, his eyes on the keyboard, while the silence on the stage gave way once more to the talk and movements of the musicians. At last, abruptly, he looked up.

"I shall make you love me, Olive," he said, his tone low and passionate.

At the words the girl made a movement of in-

voluntary recoil, but she recovered herself quickly, her face again as still and cold as before she had sung.

"Come here," commanded Zarady sharply, stung by her unspoken rebuff, and when she had advanced to the piano-ledge, keeping the corner between them, he lessened the distance by leaning across it, his eyes again a gleaming slit.

"Did you ever hear of Elfrida Swanson?" he asked.

Surprised and puzzled by the sudden change of attack, Olive Thrace hesitated, then she shook her head.

"No," she answered. "Who is she?"
The man gave an unpleasant laugh.

"I cannot tell you who she is—she's dead now for all I know," he returned with a shrug. "But I will tell you who she was. She was an American girl like you, young and with a voice and talent and beauty. She had studied and sung abroad in opera, as you have, and like you she stood here on this stage one day and sang for me. I made her the offer I have made you and she accepted it—as you do. But afterwards she tried to play with me, to make a fool of me—of me, Zarady! She meant to take—oh yes, to take, but not to give. Well—"

He broke off with another shrug, laughing again maliciously.

"Today, eight years later," he continued, "you

must ask me who she is—because she is nobody. I began her career and I ended it. Do you understand, my dear?"

Olive Thrace had gone white, but her gaze had

not once left his face.

"Yes," she replied steadily, "I understand."

The man's black eyes softened. "You have talent, much talent," he said. "But talent cannot stand alone; only genius can do that. There is too much of talent in the world. Of American girls alone studying in Europe there are enough to fill all the opera stages of the world, as tins are filled with fish. You know that. You know that all but a few must fail, the few who are lucky-or wise. I told you a year ago what I could do for you, but you thought that you could do it for yourself. Now when you have found that you cannot and your money is gone, and you have not even decent clothes to wear, you come back to me. Well, I forgive that. I forget it. I repeat my offer. I will make for you a great career. You shall be famous and rich. Isn't that worth the return I ask—a little love?"

As he bent toward her on the final words, his hand out, she again recoiled from him, despite her will.

"I shall keep my word," she answered, breathless with the fear of his touch. "But I haven't come back for the sake of the career that you can give me. I need money. I need it now. I must have it. If you really believe I shall be rich some day you ought to be willing to advance me a small part of the money that I shall earn. I need—ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand!" He eyed her in amazement. "What for?" he asked.

"What does that matter? I must have it," she replied. "I must have it at once. That is my condition."

He searched her tense face silently, waiting for an explanation of her demand. When none came a mocking smile curled his lips.

"Why don't you get it from Garrison?" he taunted. "Can't, eh? Now you see how much good he is to you. I told you so. But—perhaps it is for him you want it?" His eyes flashed suspiciously; then reassured by her blank look, he gave his quick shrug. "No matter. I shall trust you," he went on. "I shall advance you the money. But understand one thing——" He paused while his hand closed over hers. "You drop Garrison, drop him absolutely. I don't run in double harness. Don't try that, my dear."

She did not draw her hand away as he touched her, but he felt it shrink and he frowned.

"Yes," she returned in a low tone. "When can I have the money?"

Silence for a while, his dark glance narrowing upon her thoughtfully. "What is your address?" he asked at last. "The same? Very well, I shall let you know. I must arrange. I am not a rich man, you know."

Again a pause, then his hand tightened on hers

and his gaze warmed as he continued:

"In a few years from now you will think back to this hour and you will laugh, my beloved. For you will be an artist then and will know that art is all—the one mistress, the one lover that never grows old or stale. Think! Think, Olive, you shall sing here with the greatest orchestra of America, you an unknown singer shall begin where many have counted themselves fortunate to arrive after years."

"When can I have the money?" repeated the girl.

Zarady scowled.

"I can't wait. I must have it at once-today," she said.

"Today?" he echoed. "But this is Saturday, and it is now already past twelve; the banks are closed. I can do nothing until Monday."

"Monday then," she agreed reluctantly. "But not later. I can't wait longer than Monday."

"Not later," he promised. "Ah, you need not worry, my love," he added, his eyes gleaming significantly. "I shall not keep you waiting—not myself. I have waited too long already. But I

forgive you for that now. I forgive you everything."

He raised her hand to his lips.

"I must forgive you," he whispered softly as he released it. "Your coming has made me so very, very happy."

CHAPTER II

A CHANCE OF ESCAPE

A LONE in the alley leading from the stage door to the street Olive Thrace stopped. A tremor passed over her, then another and another until her entire body was shaken. "I can't do—I can't do it," she told herself in a chattering whisper. But the next words of revolt were bitten back and in another moment she had forced her feet onward.

For half a block her way lay along the side of the great concert hall, and as her eye swept the panel of framed posters that announced the approaching concerts of famous musical artists another shiver seized her. She thought of how many times during her student years in New York she had passed that line of posters and had promised herself that some day her own name should be emblazoned there, that she should sing with the great Panharmonic Orchestra, under the baton of the celebrated Alois Zarady. How little she had guessed what the realization of that dream was destined to cost!

Oh, to be a man! In the career of men merit alone counted. There was Rudolf Kala, for in-

stance. His career had been made by Zarady, as everybody knew, and with nothing to pay.

She lingered an instant before the black and white figure of the young Hungarian pianist and read the announcement below it, to the effect that he was to be the soloist of the Panharmonic concert on the following night, Sunday; then with an odd feeling of revulsion she turned sharply away. Something in the boyish face of Zarady's protégé had brought the image of the conductor himself before her mental vision. It was the eyes, perhaps; both had the same gypsy-like black eyes, full and bold, with heavy, rough eyebrows. And both had the over-long mop of straight, coarse black hair, the same heavy, sensuous mouth.

Her shoulders contracted with a slow shudder. She thought of that other girl, Elfrida Swanson. Why had she not paid Zarady's price? Had she really tried to outwit him, as he believed? Or had flesh and blood rebelled in the hour of reckoning? It might have been that. Oh yes, it might easily have been that!

She caught her thoughts up with a start. It would not do to let them run ahead to the hour of reckoning. That did not bear thinking of. For her there could be no drawing back, no escape. Her feet were set on the road they must travel and she could not turn back.

Besides, there was another ordeal to be gone

through before that one. Tony must be told.

She quickened her pace and for a dozen blocks held herself doggedly to it until it had brought her to a door in an old, ramshackled studio building. Even then she did not permit herself to lag, but knocked, turned the knob and entered without waiting for a reply from within.

"Hello," came at once in abstracted but cheerful response from a brown-haired young man standing with his back to the door, painting at

an easel.

Anthony Garrison was twenty-seven, tallish and well-built, with an attractive though not a handsome face, and exceptionally good shoulders, noticeable even in the baggy painting coat that he was wearing.

The girl waited for him to turn and see her. She knew just how he would look, how adorably his face would light up at sight of her. She knew too that she would never see him look like that again. At last, as though startled by the stillness of the room, he came out of his abstraction and looked around.

"Why—darling!" He was beside her in two strides, welcoming her with a joyous embrace. "I was just wishing for you. See what I've been doing." He drew her to the easel. "The clouds. Better, eh? What do you think?"

She did not answer him. She could not speak. She could not see the picture; everything had be-

come blurred before her eyes. His touch had brought a new, unbearable sense of what life would be without him. Involuntarily one of her hands clutched his coat. But instantly conscious of the act and fearful of again losing her self-control, she drew herself away.

"I've something to tell you," she said in a strangled voice while one hand groped in her bag. "Read this. It's from my sister." She held out a letter to him.

He stared at her in alarm. "What's the matter?" he exclaimed, ignoring the letter until she had turned away without replying, then he wrenched it from the envelope. "What's the matter?" he repeated. "Is your mother—ill?" He meant dead, for from her expression he could infer no less.

She shook her head and sank down on the nearest chair as though her strength were failing her.

"I must talk to you—explain," she faltered. "Sit down a minute—no, over there—" waving him away. "No, no. Don't touch me!" She sprang up at his approach. "Oh, Tony, you'll never want to touch me again," she added brokenly.

"What?"

He stopped short, astounded at her words. And of course they were not at all what she had meant to say. She had intended to explain quite calmly about the money that she needed. How the family purse had been emptied, filled again

by borrowing, and again emptied to prepare her for a career in opera, that he already knew. What he had now to learn was that the holder of the mortgage on her home—a kindly acquaintance who had extended the loan and allowed the interest to go unpaid for years—had suddenly died and the mortgage had been taken over from his estate by somebody who wanted to get possession of the property. If the debt, now nearly ten thousand dollars, were not paid at once the home would be lost.

So much it would be easy to tell, but how was she to make him understand that she could not allow the impending disaster to occur? Whether it was a noble sense of obligation to her people that actuated her, or an ignoble pride, she could not honestly have said. She knew only that to meet Zarady's terms seemed to her a more endurable alternative than that of shifting to her mother's and her sister's patient shoulders the burden of her failure to achieve success after their sacrifices for her.

"What did you say, Olive?" Garrison questioned slowly, as if suddenly doubtful of having heard her correctly.

Her only reply was to turn from him again with a gesture of despair.

He opened the letter and read it through. "Oh, that's too bad, dear. I'm terribly sorry," he said earnestly but with relief in his voice: "I wish

with all my heart it was in my power to---'

"I have to get the money, Tony—somehow," she interrupted. "I can't let my mother lose her home. You'll never understand, I know, but—I can't. I can't. I must get the money."

"Get it?" he echoed in wonder. "How?"

She moistened her lips nervously, but no words came.

"Is there any way that you can get it, Olive?"

"Yes." Her tone was barely audible.

"How?" He stared at her.

"From-Zarady."

"Zarady!"

"Oh, I knew I couldn't make you understand," she cried. "But there's no other way. There's no one else from whom I can borrow such a sum. Besides, how could I ever pay it back? You know what my experience has been. Without influence a beginner like me has no chance at all, you know that. Zarady would lend me the money because he knows he could make it possible for me to earn the money and repay him, and——"

"Lend you the money? Are you dreaming that Zarady would do anything for you—or for any woman—on business terms? If you are ——'

"I'm not."

The words were little more than a whisper and a pause followed them. She stared down at her hands and he watched her face, his own working with conflicting emotions. "He's married, Olive," he reminded her at last, bringing a swift flush from her but no word of reply, and at her continued silence he wheeled and walked away. Suddenly he turned and came back, his jaw set, his eyes hard.

"Look at me!" He grasped her shoulders so fiercely as to make her wince. "Is it really for your people that you want this money, or is that just an excuse? Is it the career Zarady can give you that you want? Is it? Tell me the truth, Olive. I must know."

"I want you, only you," she sobbed, clinging to him. "But I can't let my mother lose her home."

"Her home? She would far rather lose her life!"

"It isn't for her to decide. It's for me. And —she'll never know."

"You don't know what you're talking about! You don't know what you're doing!"

"I have no choice, Tony."

"Olive—listen!" He started to go on, then stopped and looked away from her. "You must go. I want to think," he went on, heavily, as if the words cost him an extreme effort. "Perhaps I can get this money for you."

"You?" She stared in amazement. "You, Tony? How?"

"I-don't know yet. I must think."

"How could you get it, Tony-ten thousand

dollars? Oh—you can't." Her spurt of hope had already died.

"Understand one thing," he answered, his eyes burning into hers. "I shall never let you go to Zarady. I'll get the money—somehow. I couldn't let you borrow money from that—beast."

She opened her lips to tell him that she had already been to Zarady, but the shameful confession stuck in her throat.

"You must go," he said again. "I-want to think."

"But I don't understand," she insisted, not moving. "How could you get the money? Tony, tell me! Is there any way you could get it?"

He gave a strange, short laugh that made her start and stare. "Oh, yes, there's a way," he said. Then his shoulders hunched themselves in a violent shudder. "Please go. I want to think," he said again, and crossed to the door and opened it for her.

She moved after him, but stopped at the door. "You look so—so strange," she said. "Tony, what's the matter?"

"Matter?" he cried harshly. "Isn't the thought of you and that man matter enough? Oh, Olive, you'd never do that—would you? Tell me you never would—no matter what happened."

She caught her breath, but did not speak.

"Olive!"

"I must have the money, Tony. If you can't

get it—'' She stopped when he turned sharply from her.

"I don't know whether I can get it or not," he said in a brusque tone, evidently under the stress of a revulsion of feeling. "I want to think. Please go. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she echoed mechanically, and when he made no offer of his usual parting caress she stepped into the hall, tentatively. But before she could turn back he had closed the door upon her. Amazed at the act she was on the point of reopening the door when the key was turned.

She recoiled, not knowing what to think. It was all so unlike him. She could hear him now moving about the room pacing it with nervous strides. She should not have come. She had only made him wretched, half maddened him, as she should have foreseen she would do. For he could not get the money for her, of course.

She caught the sound of a door opening within the studio. He was getting his street coat from a closet; he was going out. Where? Was it possible he could get the money, in some way? Oh—if he could——

But he must not find her eavesdropping, she thought, and hurried away.

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER BARGAIN

HE home of Theodore Andrassy, the banker, was spacious and beautiful, evidencing not only the owner's wealth but his taste and artistic discretion as well. Even the small reception room in which Anthony Garrison awaited the return of the butler had individuality and interest, due in part to several excellent paintings that adorned the walls—a small vanguard of the famous Andrassy collection.

Under normal conditions Garrison, as an artist, would have found the interval of waiting all too brief for what there was about him to see and enjoy; now he seemed oblivious of his surroundings, sitting with white, rigid face toward the doorway in which the butler must presently reappear.

"Mr. Andrassy requests, sir, that you will give yourself the trouble to come upstairs."

The young man had sprung up at the speaker's entrance, and answering the announcement with a quick nod he followed the servant through the hall to a small electric elevator that bore him to the floor above where he was ushered into the banker's private sitting-room.

"Ah, Garrison, how are you?"

Andrassy came forward with outstretched hand, ingratiatingly cordial. He was a man of fifty, very striking in appearance, tall and dark with a Mephisto cast of features, even to the eyebrows. More than one famous prima donna had likened him to Faust's fascinating evil genius, but he was growing too stout now for that particular compliment. However he was still handsome and with more than ever the air of the Maecenas that he was, and as he had remained a bachelor he doubtless continued to be flattered by ladies both famous and fair.

His caller returned a perfunctory greeting, waited until the butler had retired, then closed the door behind him and said:

"I've come to tell you that I will go to Brazil."
"Ah!" The banker's blue eyes lighted swiftly.
"That is splendid!" he exclaimed. "I have always believed, my dear boy, that you must at last come to your senses."

"I will go on the terms that you offered me before—with one new condition," continued Garrison coldly. "Part of the money that you agreed to pay me on my arrival at Rio must be paid to me before I leave New York—ten thousand dollars in cash."

Andrassy's eyes widened a little with surprise, but he answered pleasantly: "Sit down; we must discuss this."

"It is not open to discussion," said Garrison, ignoring the gesture toward a chair.

"But my dear boy, what guarantee have I that after receiving this money you will not refuse to go to Rio?" protested the older man with a deprecating smile.

"What guarantee have you that I will carry

out our agreement if I go?"

"Ah, as to that I have no fear," Andrassy's black eyes narrowed for an instant, then recovered their former mildness as he added: "Your father was a man of his word; you are his son. That is enough for me."

A frown flitted across the face of the artist, but

he made no reply.

"I have always believed," Andrassy went on, "that you would one day prove yourself the man of action and of enterprise that your father was, that you would at last wake up to the value of money. I congratulate you that you have done so. And—perhaps I shall soon have the pleasure of congratulating you on another awakening." He smiled. "I have often observed that young men discover the importance of money at precisely the same moment that they become aware of the importance of—love."

"But please do not take offense at my little jest," he added when Garrison flushed. "I do not wish to pry into your private affairs. Your reason for accepting my offer does not concern me—not at all. I am satisfied with the fact. And let me say again that I have no doubt whatever that you will faithfully fulfill the terms of our agreement."

"If I take the money I shall earn it," said Garrison shortly. "But I must have the ten thousand dollars advance payment not later

than Monday-Monday morning."

"I agree," was the answer. "You have me in your power and can make your own terms. You shall have the money Monday morning. And now——" he paused to consult his watch, then resumed in a somewhat different tone, more business-like, less conciliatory than before—— "you will go to Washington at once for your passport, which as you know, I suppose, is still a necessity. A train leaves for Washington in twenty minutes. You will take it."

"Go to Washington today? Why? I can do nothing there until Monday."

"Yes, I think the matter of your passport may be arranged this evening so that you will be able to take the boat sailing Monday. Report to Mr. Marsh—you know him—at the Willard as soon as you arrive. I shall 'phone him in the meantime and he will instruct you further. Now, as to funds——'

"I have enough for the trip to Washington."

"As you like." The banker returned his billcase to his pocket. "But you have no time to lose. Fortunately I have a car at the door. I will give the order." He took up the telephone from the table beside him. "Please do not wait," he said. "The stairs are to the right."

The order regarding the car having been communicated to a servant, Theodore Andrassy watched the machine leave his door, following its progress until it disappeared around a corner. A gleam of triumph was in his eyes when he turned back from the window and again unhooked the telephone receiver. But now there came a knock at the door, arresting his action. It was the butler.

"Mr. Zarady, sir," he said.

The announcement was received by his master with a silent stare. A novice in the butler's place would have inferred that his words had not been heard and would have repeated them. But Franz knew better. He waited.

"Where is he?" Andrassy questioned finally.

"In the library, sir."

"He didn't see Mr. Garrison leave then?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. I will go down. Bring us a bottle of wine. Then call Mr. Perez and ask him to come here at once. You will probably find him at the club. When you have done that call Washington and get Mr. Marsh. As soon as you have him let me know."

"Yes, sir." Franz turned to go.

"Bring the '84 Tokay."

The butler stopped. "Excuse me, sir," he said. "But it is the '94 that Mr. Zarady prefers."

"Very well, the '94 then," assented the banker. He stared at the broad, middle-aged back of his servant as the latter again turned away. "You have an extraordinary memory, Franz," he remarked suddenly.

Franz made no reply, aware that none was expected or desired. But, unseen, his mild eyes stirred uneasily beneath their drooping lids, as if the comment had surprised him, and—for some reason—surprised him unpleasantly.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNTOUCHED WINE

"I AM afraid that I come at an inconvenient hour, Theodore," Zarady began apologetically as soon as the greetings were over and the two were seated in the library. "But the affair is urgent." He waited, studying his friend's face anxiously. "I want you to arrange a loan for me," he went on. "I must have the money Monday. The collateral which I am able to furnish falls short and—I must depend on you to help me out. The affair is very urgent."

The anxiety in his glance deepened as he repeated the phrase of appeal, a fact that did not escape his host, who smiled quizzically as he answered.

"Speculating again, Alois?"

"No, no—nothing of that kind," disclaimed the musician hastily. "Here is the list of my collateral,"—drawing a paper from his pocket and holding it out. "They do not cover the loan, as you see, but——" He broke off and waited for the list to be read.

"Ten thousand, Monday," murmured the banker without looking up from the paper, appearing to consider the proposition.

"Yes. It is something that has come up very suddenly, very unexpectedly. I 'phoned you downtown, but you had already left and I could not wait. I must have the money not later than Monday."

"Monday morning?"

"Yes."

"I see. Ten thousand, not later than Monday morning," Andrassy repeated reflectively. "Very well, Alois, I shall be delighted to oblige you."

"Ah!" A relieved sigh broke from Zarady. "I thank you, Theodore. You are a good friend."

"But," continued the banker, disregarding the tribute, "if, by any chance, you are borrowing the money for Miss Olive Thrace—Ah, I thought so! In that case, Alois, you need not trouble yourself further. Garrison has just made arrangements with me to come to that young lady's assistance."

"Garrison!" Zarady was on his feet, glaring furiously. "She came to me!"

Andrassy shrugged his shoulders. "She must also have gone to him. At any rate, he has just been here and I have agreed to give him ten thousand dellars on Monday. That he wants it for Miss Thrace I think there can be no doubt, as I happen to know that that is the amount of which she is just now in need. She wants it to pay off

a mortgage on her home, a mortgage which'—he paused and fixed his eyes squarely on his companion—"I hold."

"You?"

"I. Ah, here is Franz. I am sure you will join me in a glass of your favorite wine, the '94. At least, Franz tells me the '94 is your favorite."

Zarady muttered something indistinctly and sat down again, watching with sullen brows while the butler filled two glasses from the bottle of Hungarian wine that he had brought in.

"You will find this excellent," said Andrassy, raising a glass to let the light play through the amber colored contents before he passed it to his guest.

The latter accepted it in scowling silence, his hand trembling, despite his effort to control himself in the servant's presence; but the instant Franz had left the room he set the glass down on the table untasted.

"You hold it?" he exclaimed. "I don't understand."

His host eyed him briefly without answering and when he spoke his tone was triumphant.

"Garrison is going to Brazil."

"So—that's it! I see!" cried Zarady. "You have caused the girl's need of this money in order to bend Garrison to your will."

"Exactly. It was a clever scheme you must

grant. Come, drink your wine. My success deserves a toast. Later I will drink to yours—with the lady."

Zarady declined with a curt gesture the glass held out to him. "You would be as wise to throw your money away," he answered. "Garrison will trick you; that's my opinion."

"I'll take my chance of it," retorted the banker.
"He sails on Monday, and"—his eyes hardening with a sudden thought—"I shall tolerate no interference with my plans. You know that, I think. But come, drink your wine, man. What is one woman more or less compared with good Tokay?"

The invitation met with the same brusque refusal as before. Zarady rose to go.

"Be patient, Alois—only be patient," counselled Andrassy, rising also. "Once in Brazil Garrison will never come back. Then comes your turn with the girl, who, judging from your interest in her, must be very charming."

"She has a voice and talent," snapped the musician.

"No doubt, no doubt!" his host assented with a derisive laugh.

"Good-day." Zarady strode to the door, furious.

"Stay and lunch, Alois."

"Thank you. Good-day."

The words were flung over the speaker's

shoulder and he closed the door behind him with a deliberate slam, which only caused the target of its insulting vehemence to throw back his head and laugh aloud.

"What a child!" he said to himself. What children they all were, these votaries of art, and what fools! Had not Alois Zarady trouble enough with a jealous wife and that insufferable young ape of his, Kala? And there was Garrison, too. Three months ago, though all but starving, the artist had flung his offer to go to Brazil back in his face. Now, for a woman—in a world of women—Bah!

With a shrug of contempt, Andrassy turned to ring for Franz when his eye chanced to fall on the untouched glass of wine. He frowned, staring at it fixedly for a moment before he crossed to the bell.

"Well—about Washington?" he questioned when the butler appeared.

"Mr. Marsh is at luncheon, sir," answered Franz. "His secretary will have him call you as soon as he returns. Mr. Perez has just come in."

"Send him here."

Franz withdrew, and returning to the table the banker stood again staring down at the glass of golden Tokay.

"Juan!" he exclaimed as the door opened and a man of thirty-five or thereabouts entered. "You've no time to lose. I want Zarady watched —watched constantly, do you understand! He's in love with that girl himself. I didn't suspect such a thing, hadn't counted on it. He must be watched. He may make trouble for us.''

"What trouble can be make?" Perez spoke sneeringly and with a marked foreign accent that five years in the United States had done little

to modify.

"He has just left here," replied Andrassy.
"He came to borrow ten thousand dollars for Miss
Thrace, and was furious when I told him Garrison had already been here for——"

"So he came, Garrison?"

"Yes, he came and he's on his way now to Washington. He sails Monday." The banker paused impressively. "Juan, nothing must be allowed to interfere with our plans—nothing. Zarady must be watched, so that if he dares to make a move against us we can block it at once. I don't trust him. I believe now that he has had no interest in our affair except as a means of getting rid of Garrison. He thought that with Garrison out of the way he would have a free hand with the girl."

"Well, Garrison will be out of the way-for-ever."

"Yes, but Zarady has evidently discovered that that won't help him with the girl, and that his only hope is to put her under a heavy obligation to him. He was beside himself with rage when he heard that Garrison was to give her the money, didn't even drink his wine—left it standing there. He must be watched, I tell you, every minute until Garrison is gone. He'll thwart us if he can."

"What can he do?" sneered Perez.

"This," said Andrassy impatiently. "He can tell the girl where Garrison is getting the money and what we are sending him to Brazil for, and if she knows that she will not let him go."

"What good will that do Zarady?"

"It will thwart me."

"But what will he gain? Zarady's not a fool. If he wants the girl he will never tell her a thing that will make Garrison out a hero to her. He's not a fool."

"No, Zarady's not a fool," assented the banker, with a faint stress on the name that was, however, quite lost on the self-satisfied Brazilian. "I'll tell you what he would gain. He would gain his whole object—the girl. For if she refuses to accept Garrison's sacrifices she must get the money from some other source, and apparently she has no other except Zarady. If she accepts his help she will pay his price. That is what he will gain by telling her our plans."

"But we can't prevent his telling her-"

"We can prevent his getting the money for her. He will have to borrow it, and if I know where he goes for it I can prevent the loan being made. That is why I want him watched. The girl must have this money on Monday, and she must be forced to take it from Garrison. Otherwise he will not go to Brazil. Do you understand now? After all our waiting and planning Garrison will not go."

The face of the Brazilian darkened. "If

Zarady stops that he'll answer for it."

"He must not be allowed to stop it. If we lose this hold on Garrison we shall never get another. He must sail for South America Monday. Put men to watch Zarady and report to me every move he makes—every move."

Perez nodded.

"Do it immediately. There is no time to waste. The girl must be watched also."

"That's being done," said Perez and without further words went away.

Andrassy rang for Franz. "Luncheon," he said, passing on to the drawing-room beyond while the butler lingered to remove the wine glasses and wine.

At the end of the drawing-room stood a piano and thither the banker turned his steps. He played the piano well and was proud of the accomplishment, prouder still that he could afford to treat his skill as an accomplishment and not as a means of livelihood. For his father and grandfather had been professional musicians and had he not migrated to America from Hungary

in his early boyhood he would doubtless have followed in their footsteps.

But the new environment stimulated other talents which promised greater rewards. At thirty-five he was already a rich man and beginning to be known as a patron of musicians and artists; and nothing that success ever brought him was measurable with his snobbish satisfaction in that rôle. For years now his private concerts had been famous and invitations to them eagerly sought. He was fond of saying that he made art his servant, not his master; for what were the servants of art but the servants of men, toys that performed their tricks of singing, painting, or what not, for any lout with a golden key to wind them with?

He struck the piano keys with a succession of loud, sharp chords, measured the compass of tone with a run or two, then modulated into a swift, well-marked melody. Lacking the gift of improvisation he had a prodigious memory on which he could draw for hours at the dictation of his mood. The rapid melody was soon lost in something slower, more subdued, and this in turn in a gently flowing movement, soft and ruminative.

A voice and talent? Perhaps—perhaps. Attractive the girl must be; there was evidence in plenty of that. One might investigate. Possibly it would be amusing to have a concert for her,

lend a hand in her career. It would annoy Alois, and that at any rate would be amusing.

Andrassy laughed out, struck a decisive final chord and rose.

"Luncheon is served, sir," said Franz, who had been standing in the doorway, his mild eyes blinking patiently while he waited for a pause in the music.

CHAPTER V

QUICK-A DOCTOR

ETER BENNETT almost raised his hand to rub his eyes as he stared down at the announcement on the leaflet that he had been handed with his program.

"Miss Olive Thrace will make her debut this evening with the Panharmonic Orchestra. Between the first and second numbers of the program she will sing 'Vissi d'arte' from La Tosca."

Olive Thrace! Surely he was dreaming. His glance swept again the stageful of musicians and the crowded auditorium—so crowded indeed that not having secured a seat in advance he was obliged to stand—and he half expected that when he looked back at the paper in his hand he would discover himself to have been the victim of a mental aberration.

"Who is she, this Olive Thrace? Ever hear of her?" The inquirer was an elderly man at Bennett's left elbow.

The latter looked at him, hesitated, then returned a negative.

"No one has, it seems," observed the stranger.
"There has been nothing about her in the papers.
Most amazing thing I've ever heard of, intro-

ducing a singer in this informal, unheralded fashion. A freak of Zarady's to arouse curiosity, I suppose, but it strikes me as decidedly undignified for an organization of the Panharmonic's standing. These Sunday night subscription concerts are the biggest musical events of the season. Kala must be indignant. They never have more than one soloist, you know, and he has been announced for weeks. There's the Steiner piano that he always uses, and they say at the box office that he will positively appear. Still, it won't surprise me if he doesn't."

"Oh, he'll play. He knows which side his bread is buttered on."

This prediction came from a man on Peter's right, a young man so eager to air his opinions that he proceeded to do so without the encouragement of a response of any kind from his hearers.

"Zarady made Kala," he asserted. "And he will ruin him if he takes the notion. All he has to do is to drop him from his list of soloists. That will make people think Kala hasn't come up to his expectations and the boy will be done for—as a first-rater. Sounds ridiculous, but it's so. The trouble is we Americans don't know anything about music and we follow blindly anybody we think does know. You'll see tonight. They'll go wild over this new singer simply because Zarady is sponsor for her, and she's probably

no better than dozens of others that can't get a chance. She *looks* good to him, that's all."

A knowing glance gave point to the closing remark, and its ugly implication sent a flush to Bennett's face. He glared at the speaker, who however did not note the fact.

"Mrs. Zarady is not here, you'll notice," the young man went on, indicating an empty box above them to the right. "But then she never comes, you know, when Kala plays."

There was another significant glance with this piece of information and doubtless explanatory details would have followed if a burst of clapping from the audience had not at that moment intervened.

The conductor had made his appearance. Crossing briskly to his stand, he turned, bowed once very deeply in acknowledgment of his reception, then wheeled, raised his baton, and, when complete silence had fallen, began the concert.

At the end of the first number, after the applause, there came a wait, an expectant stillness. Zarady, his back to the audience, seemed to hold the people tense in their seats by the example of his own motionless form.

Abruptly then he turned and looked toward the wings and, as if at a signal, the singer entered.

She was in white, all soft and shimmering. Her fair hair rippled back from her forehead into

a simple coil, and as her white-slippered feet tripped girlishly across the vast stage she was an alluring vision of youth and loveliness.

And it was she, Olive! Peter had almost hoped it would not be. He took no part in the kindly pattering of applause that welcomed the stranger, hardly heard it. He merely waited, his eyes on her face. Olive Thrace! The thing was too amazing.

"I have lived for art; I have loved for love; I have never harmed a living soul—"

Thus humbly, quietly, begins Floria Tosca's prayer, the prayer for deliverance from Scarpia, who claims her as the price of her lover's life. With eyes upraised and palms together in a simple pose of supplication, the singer seemed to pour into her tones the warmth of a real emotion. The opening mood of the aria, pious and subdued, changed swiftly to more vehement pleading, and reached its climax in a cry of frantic questioning of divine justice: "Why, why, Heavenly Father, dost thou reward me thus?" Then it sank again to resignation and was over.

"Listen to that, will you? Didn't I tell you so?" demanded Bennett's right-hand neighbor when an almost tumultuous burst of clapping greeted the completion of the aria.

"She can sing," snapped the older man on the other side. "I've never heard that better done—never with greater depth of feeling."

"Guess she knows how it feels, that's why," was the retort. "Too bad she can't finish her Scarpia with a knife. Look, there he goes after her. Can't wait to tell her what a hit she's made."

Bennett stepped back, with the intention of taking himself out of earshot. There was no real foundation for such slanderous deductions, he felt confident; that sort of mud was thrown at every successful woman singer; but since common sense forbade his knocking the slanderer down he decided to flee from the temptation to do so. However, as he turned Olive Thrace reappeared to bow, and he lingered while again and again she came back in response to the enthusiastic plaudits.

"Now what's the use of keeping it up like that?" grumbled the obnoxious chatterer. "They know well enough she won't sing again. Zarady never gives encores. Never has in all the years he—She is going to sing! Well, what do you know about that? And he's going to play for her himself! Well!"

That others were equally astonished at the overriding of custom was obvious from the sharp cessation of applause at the conductor's reappearance, and its delighted renewal when he walked over and sat down at the piano.

"Too bad. It establishes a precedent that—"
The rest of the lament was unspoken, for, as

Zarady struck the keys, sounds of some sort of disturbance issued from behind Bennett's group and caused everyone to turn.

"Somebody's fainted."

Bennett frowned. He was a doctor and if it were true that someone had fainted it was his duty to find out if his services were needed. For a moment he hesitated, loath to go, his eyes on Olive Thrace's face; then he followed the ushers who were carrying a limp figure toward the exit.

Accustomed to such tasks the men hurried across the foyer and deposited their burden on a

lounge in a small retiring room.

"I'm a doctor," said Peter as he joined them, and at the welcome news two of them departed forthwith, leaving the third, their senior, in command.

The patient was a middle-aged man, thin and grizzled, decently dressed in worn, but clean, well-pressed clothes. Off-hand, Bennett put him down as a foreigner, one of the hardworking, music-loving band that line the walls at high grade concerts because they cannot afford seats. That one of them should now and then succumb to the strain of standing was to be expected, and in a case such as the present one it could have been confidently predicted.

While he felt the man's pulse Peter studied the unconscious face with its pallid, shrunken cheeks until, struck suddenly by a suspicion, he raised the eye-lids to see the pupils, then bared the man's left fore-arm. He was not surprised to find its surface mottled with tell-tale pricks.

"Dopes, eh?" said the usher.

Instantly, as if the word had reached the sleeping brain, the man stirred and opened his eyes. "What is it?" he murmured weakly. Then, the unfamiliar faces registering on his vision, he started up, alarmed.

"Lie still a minute," said Peter. "You're weak; you fainted." He gently forced him down again.

"I'm all right," the stranger protested, staring dazedly. "I'm all right," he repeated. "I'm all right, I say!" He thrust Bennett aside and pulled himself to his feet. "Let me go," he muttered sullenly.

"Aw, nobody's keeping you," said the usher, and at that, without waiting for another word, the man lurched weakly to the door and on through the foyer to the street.

Peter let him go. No use to waste time or effort on that breed, he knew. Besides, the cold air would pick him up.

"The stuff's sure got him," commented the usher. "Afraid you'd take his hypo away, I guess."

Peter nodded and started for the auditorium, not inclined to quarrel with his speedy release. He had, however, hardly covered half the distance when the door for which he was making was thrown violently open and one of the two ushers who had helped with the fainting man dashed out, so impetuously that he landed in Peter's arms.

"You're wanted—quick!" he panted. "Mr. Zarady's very sick."

"Sick?" echoed Peter.

"Yes. They carried him off and they want a doctor. Come on. I'll show you the way."

CHAPTER VI

A SPOT ON AN APRON

HE buzz of excited whispering, like the noise of a million bees, filled the auditorium when Dr. Bennett re-entered it at the heels of his guide. Most of the musicians were still at their posts, their anxious glances bent upon the door through which their leader had been borne away, but Olive Thrace had, of course, withdrawn.

Before he had reached the door to the stage Peter found himself in a veritable procession of doctors. Yet, quickly as they had responded to their summons, several of their colleagues were already beside Zarady's body, which lay on a double row of chairs, and the idleness of these men together with their solemnity informed the newcomers instantly that all haste was in vain. The great conductor was dead.

"Heart failure," one of the early arrivals told Peter. "He must have been dead when he struck the floor. Yes, the usual thing, just dropped. He was playing an accompaniment for the encore—a song that he wrote himself, they say—and suddenly, he collapsed. The girl who was singing

was so absorbed that she didn't seem to notice when the piano stopped—went right on. Some of the musicians jumped up, then the audience. That stopped her, and when she saw what had happened she came near keeling over, herself. But one of the men got to her in time and some of the others carried Zarady off. Then a man came out and asked for a doctor. But some of us hadn't waited, of course, and—Look, that's Kala!''

The young pianist was coming toward them. His face was very pale, and with his mop of black hair and his thick, black eye-brows and his black evening clothes he might have been one of the black and white posters of himself outside the concert hall, come suddenly to life. At his approach those surrounding the dead man drew back, and as their movements revealed the corpse of his benefactor to his view, Kala uttered a hysterical cry and flung himself into the arms of a companion.

"Takes it hard. Those foreigners are always emotional," commented Peter's neighbor. "That must be the manager," he added, turning. "Guess he's going to dismiss the audience."

The surmise proved to be correct. The audience was informed that Mr. Zarady had been taken seriously ill and could not continue the concert, this expedient half-truth being followed by an announcement about the refunding of money at the box office. At once the noises of a moving

multitude broke out and the musicians began swarming from the stage, talking excitedly, then falling into silence on learning the truth. They gathered about their dead leader and stared down at him with troubled faces, already wondering, probably, what his death would mean to their own future.

Peter had withdrawn to make room for them and he now found himself standing alone, somewhat to the rear of the stage. He might as well go, he thought; there was nothing he could do. The other doctors were leaving, hastening to rejoin their companions. Being alone, he had no need to return to the crowded auditorium, but could reach the street more quickly by the stage door.

He looked about and concluded that the stage door must be on the other side, but he did not go in search of it. He was held by a desire to see Olive Thrace and thought it likely that she was in one of two nearby rooms whose transoms showed light—dressing-rooms, probably.

Presently the door of one room opened and Kala and two other men came out. The pianist, in overcoat and hat, walked between his companions, who talked to him soothingly as they hurried him along.

Peter turned slowly to follow in their wake. He had not the slightest excuse for hanging around any longer, he told himself. There was nothing he could do. Olive had friends with her, of course. Besides, she would be excited and in no mood to see him. She might not even remember him.

He turned away reluctantly, and at the first step wheeled back. He had heard a doorknob rattle. The next moment Olive Thrace stepped out of her dressing-room.

She was not dressed for the street, as Kala had been, and she was alone. Closing the door behind her, she paused and looked around, seemingly irresolute. Bennett's legs propelled him toward her without his volition.

"Can I do anything?" he asked, adding impulsively: "You remember me, don't you, Olive—Peter Bennett?"

She stared at him blankly for an instant, brought back too abruptly from her preoccupation; then the blankness in her face gave way to relief.

"You're a doctor now, aren't you? Oh come in, please!"

When he was in the room she closed the door upon them quickly. "Look. I—can't wake her up," she said with a nervous catch of her breath, kneeling as she spoke beside the body of a rather stout young woman in apron and cap, who lay on the floor near an overturned chair. From her position, the woman appeared to have fallen from

the chair and pulled it down with her. "I found her like this. I don't know what—I think she—must have fainted."

"Is that why the window is open?" Peter asked. He was on his knees also examining the woman, but he paused to indicate the open window through which the wintry night air was pouring in upon them.

Olive Thrace rose with a start. Despite her evening dress she had obviously been unconscious of the cold, and she did not speak until after she had closed the window.

"I thought the fresh air might rouse her," she said.

"Put something warm over that gown," ordered Peter.

"Oh, never mind me! Please, please do something for her. Can't you give her something?"

"Not till I make up my mind what she needs. In the meantime, please put on that coat hanging there."

She seemed about to expostulate again, but reconsidered the matter and put on the coat instead, probably perceiving that to be the quickest way to end the discussion.

His preliminary examination completed, Peter set the fallen chair on its legs and lifted the woman into it. The result was to partly rouse her. She opened her eyes and blinked at him, then her lids dropped again and her heavy body

slumped. He promptly straightened it. As he did so a spot on the bib of her apron caught his eye.

It was a yellowish stain, still moist. He smelt it, then smelt the woman's breath. Turning, he looked over at a tray on the dressing-table on which two glasses stood.

"What was in that glass there?"

Olive Thrace took up the glass indicated, the bottom of which was colored by a darkish yellow fluid. "A gargle for the throat," she replied after a moment of silence, and then, before he realized what she was about, she had turned on the water in the bowl that filled one corner of the room and had the glass under the stream.

"I wanted to see that!" cried Peter.

"I'm sorry," she answered, emptying the diluted contents of the glass and refilling it with clear water. "Perhaps if you dash cold water in her face it will wake her up."

He vetoed the suggestion, waving away the glass she held out to him. "What was the gargle? Where's the bottle?"

"The bottle?"

"Yes. She may have drunk some of it. She is plainly under the influence of a narcotic of some kind, and many throat lotions contain such drugs. Though it's possible she takes a drug habitually and just chanced to get an overdose. Have you ever suspected her of a drug habit?"

The girl hesitated. "No," she answered then. "But I don't know much about her. She isn't really my maid. She is only helping me tonight."

"Well, in that case it is possible she did take a swig of your gargle not knowing it was not meant to be swallowed. Was it pleasant-tasting stuff?"

"Yes-rather."

"Patented preparation?"

"I don't—remember. A druggist recommended it."

"Where's the rest of it? Where's the bottle?"

"I—" glancing about vaguely—"She must have thrown it away. But—can't you give her something, Peter? Isn't there something you could give her to counteract the effects if—she has drunk—anything?" She regarded the unconscious face with frank anxiety. "Is it safe to let her stay like that?"

"Her heart is strong. She's in no danger," said Bennett.

"Are you sure? Are you sure, Peter?"

"Of course. She'll be all right. She'll sleep it—"

A knock at the door interrupted him and caused the girl at his side to start. Her nerves had been badly jarred, he thought, watching her as she went to open the door. A masculine voice without spoke to her, but the door was not sufficiently ajar to reveal the speaker. Peter heard him ask for a few minutes' talk, and Olive, with a murmured apology, left the room, closing the door after her.

Alone with his unconscious patient, Peter looked about for the bottle of throat lotion. Even if empty, the odor should give him a clew. He was rather solicitous about that lotion; Olive shouldn't be using such things.

But no empty bottle nor any with yellowish contents was in sight. He moved a box of magnificent roses from a chair on the chance that the object of his search might be behind it; but all he found was something he would rather not have seen-Zarady's card. He had sent the roses.

Giving up the hunt, Peter now decided to take advantage of Olive's absence to try the effect of cold air on his patient. Under other conditions he would have simply allowed her to sleep off the drug she had taken, but since she could not remain where she was she must be roused.

Dragging her and her chair close to the window he threw up the sash. As the first icy blast struck her the woman opened her mouth and gulped it down. He raised her arms over her head and lowered them again briskly, repeating the movement until her breathing quickened. The cold air in her lungs did the rest, as he expected. After a few moments she opened her eyes and looked at him, then around the room, vaguely.

"What's the matter?" she asked, her glance returning, somewhat enlivened, to his face.

"Nothing now," he answered, in his quiet, professional voice. "You went to sleep and fell off your chair, that's all. Miss Thrace found you on the floor and thought you had fainted."

"On the floor?" She stared at him, then stood up, shivering.

He got her coat from a hook on the wall. "Better put this on," he advised. "I don't want to close the window just yet. The air is good for you."

She let him put the coat on her. Obviously she was still dazed; she frowned with the effort she made to collect her wits. Peter watched closely, for he was puzzled. She was a very robust-looking woman of thirty-odd and had not at all the appearance of a drug addict.

"What made you go to sleep?" he asked her, when she showed no inclination to talk unprompted. "What had you been drinking?"

"Drinking?" She echoed the word mechanically, for no other reason, he thought, than that it chanced to be the last he had spoken. Her frown deepened. She seemed now sufficiently awake to know that she was not entirely so. Her eyes moved slowly about the small room. "Where is Miss Thrace?" she inquired suddenly.

"She will be back presently," answered Peter.

The woman turned toward the door with a look of listening. "Is she singing?" she asked.

"No, the concert is over."

"Over?" Her eyes widened in surprise. "What time is it?"

He hesitated. "Not late," he told her. "Mr. Zarady was taken ill and the audience has been dismissed."

Her lips opened, as if for another half-dazed echo of some word of his, but this time nothing came. Instead, she closed her mouth again, firmly, and looked at him. He saw that she was getting herself in hand.

"What have you been drinking?" he questioned. She stared on at him without answering for a moment, then her glance shifted toward the dressing-table. "Nothing," she said shortly.

"What made you so sleepy?"

"I was tired." She shrugged her heavy shoulders. "I was up all night, sick. And sitting here, doing nothing—Are you a doctor?"

He nodded. He was tempted to add that being a doctor she must not expect him to believe that mere loss of sleep had caused that abnormal contraction of the pupils of her eyes; but he restrained the impulse. She was plainly not stupid; she knew what ailed her.

"Miss Thrace will be going home, I guess," she remarked. "I'd better pack up."

She took a traveling bag from beneath the table, set it on a chair, and opened it. Bennett looked

into it with the idea that the missing bottle of throat lotion might be there. But the bag was empty. Then the door opened and Olive came in.

"Oh—" She stopped at sight of her maid normally occupied, and Peter noticed that her eyes flew to him and back again to the woman before she added: "Are you all right again, Annie?"

"Yes, miss," Annie replied without looking up.
"I hope as you'll excuse me, miss, for going to sleep. But I didn't sleep none at all last night, account of neuralgia."

Bennett, listening, all but gaped at the woman, so taken aback was he by the change in her manner and speech, now those of the typical meagerly educated domestic servant, whereas before they had been—well, different. He found himself at a loss how to classify her previous manner. She had not even then suggested a person of refinement, but she had seemed far removed from what she now appeared.

"I see," murmured Olive in a relieved tone.
"I'm glad you're all right again." She glanced at Peter and it seemed to him that she hesitated an instant before she asked if he'd mind getting her a cab.

Of course not, he told her; he was delighted to be of service.

"She wants to get rid of me," he thought. "Why?"

CHAPTER VII

SOMETHING OVERHEARD

Securing a taxicab at Panharmonic Hall at that particular time was a thing more easily promised than performed, as Dr. Bennett found on reaching the street. The curb was thickly lined with people from the concert waiting to snap up anything on wheels that hove in sight. Satisfied, after a survey of the scramble, that his chances of "picking up" anything were very doubtful, he decided to get his own machine, and re-entering the building he inquired of the stage doorman for a telephone. The doorman led him to a small room nearby, a sort of combination office and property-room.

"This is Dr. Bennett," said Peter when he had his garage on the wire. "I want my car at once at Panharmonic Hall—stage door. Blaney's there, isn't he? All right. Tell him to hurry."

Blaney was his chauffeur.

Peter was aware as he telephoned of the doorman lingering, idly curious, at the door to listen. But as he hung up the receiver the man's attention was suddenly distracted by a voice from without. It was the voice of the woman, Annie, and Peter, curious now, paused to hear what she had to say, screened from her sight by the doorman's portly form.

"You're the stage doorman, aren't you?" the woman asked, and Peter noted with interest that she had reverted to her first manner. "Then you know who brought that bottle of wine to Miss Thrace's dressing-room. Who was it? She wants to know."

"Wine?" The man was evidently at a loss.

"Somebody put a bottle of wine in her dressingroom," repeated Annie impatiently. "You see everybody that comes in, don't you? Well, who brought that wine?"

"Wine? There was some flowers come for her."

"They came later. The wine was already in the room when he got here."

"Was it now?" queried the man. "Then you know more about it than I do." With this he moved as if to turn and end the discussion; but the next question from the woman brought his gaze back to her in astonishment.

"Where have they taken Zarady?" she asked. "Home or to a hospital?"

"Hospital? What would they take him to a hospital for when he's dead?"

"Dead!"

"Sure. Say, where've you been all evening?"
Asleep?"

After this crushing rejoinder the doorman looked round at Peter. "Get your number, Doctor?" he inquired ingratiatingly, his mind on a possible tip.

Peter nodded, looking past him at the woman, who seeing him stepped quickly out of sight and

hurried away.

"That there 'phone has had a busy evening," remarked the doorman while Peter felt for a coin. "They had to call up Mrs. Zarady, for one thing. She wasn't here. She never comes when Mr. Kala plays, you know."

"Is that so?" Peter eyed his informant

interestedly.

"Well—that's what they say," the latter returned, hedging. "Of course, I don't know, seing back here all the time. Anyhow, she wasn't here tonight. They had to call her up—told her Mr. Zarady was sick, to prepare her before they brought his body home. It would have been an awful shock bringing him dead, you see, because she thought the world of him—at least, that's what they all tell me. Thank you, sir,"—pocketing the tip. "Will I look out for your car, Doctor?"

"No, thanks," said Bennett. "I'll wait for it outside."

He returned to the sidewalk, traversing the passage that led to it on the trail of a couple of musicians who were talking in low, earnest voices.

They fell silent as he neared them, he noticed, and he had caught nothing of what they said except Kala's name. But he gave them no thought. He was thinking of other things, of the woman Annie and what she had said about a bottle of wine.

It was wine then that she had drunk, not throat gargle. Why had Olive deceived him? Apparently she did not know where the wine had come from and sent the woman to ask—after first getting rid of him.

What did it all mean? That woman had certainly been under some sort of narcotic influence, from wine she had drunk. Why had Olive not said so frankly? Why had the woman herself denied drinking anything?

And what had become of the wine? It was not in the dressing-room; there was no place where it could have been concealed. It had been removed then. By whom? And why?

Peter was troubled. He hated deceit. His own nature was as candid as daylight, and he recalled Olive Thrace as the most straightforward of girls. Of course, it was years since he had seen her, she might have changed. But, hang it, no! People did not change in ways like that.

His car arrived from the garage in record time and he went back to the dressing-room. As he knocked he heard the sound of a window being lowered, then Olive's voice called to him to come in. Involuntarily his first glance was at the window, which he remembered having closed before leaving the room; he wondered why it had been opened again. To throw her flowers out, apparently, for several rose petals lay on the window-sill and the flowers were nowhere to be seen. Rather an odd thing to do, he thought, with such magnificent roses.

His second glance showed him that the girl was alone. A veil was wound about her hair, her coat was buttoned to the throat, her bag stood ready.

"Annie has gone," she explained. "I wanted to take her home, but she preferred not. Probably she lives in some poor section that she is ashamed to have me see. She is a maid in the boarding-house where I have been living. I got her to act as my maid for the evening, for the sake of appearances. I have no regular maid. I've never had one. You see, Peter"—smiling faintly at him—"I'm not as important or prosperous as I hope I look."

Peter laughed. She had not changed at all, he told himself with relief; she was as simple and frank as ever.

"Don't worry," he said. "You look your part all right."

"Wait a minute." She put her hand on the bag that he was lifting from the chair. "I want to there's something I want to tell you—to ask you."

"Yes?" He looked at her, wondering at her

"The man I've just been talking to is a concert manager," she went on. "He has made me an offer for a tour—a splendid offer, I think. He seems to be confident of my success."

"Why wouldn't he be?" said Peter heartily, feeling from her manner that she wanted encouragement, though why she should want it after her unquestionable triumph of the evening he could not understand.

"I'll do my best. I—it's so hard to say," she broke off. "I—heard that—Mother wrote me that your uncle had died and left you his money."

"He did—yes," Bennett said, rather taken aback.

"Oh,—" She stopped an instant again, then plunged ahead. "Could you lend me some money, Peter? A lot? Ten thousand dollars? I'll pay you back. I know I can. I'm to get my contracts for the concert tour tomorrow morning. They will be a sort of security for you—"

"Good lord, Olive, I don't want any security," he interrupted. "Of course you can have the money. When do you want it?"

"Tomorrow. I must have it tomorrow," she answered, insisting then, despite his protests, on explaining the purpose for which the money was to be used. "Mr. Zarady was going to advance it to me," she said in conclusion. "But of course now—"

"Much better for you to borrow from me," said

Peter, a trifle brusquely, for the thought of her borrowing from Zarady was distasteful to him. "I wish you had come to me in the first place."

She turned from him with a catch in her voice as she said: "If only I had known you were in New York. If only I had known yesterday."

"Well, you know now," said he. "And I'll lose no time. I'll go to the bank as soon as it opens tomorrow morning. Shall I have them telegraph it? That would be quicker, only—my name might have to appear——"

"Oh, I don't mind if it does," she put in. "I'd like it done the quickest way. I don't care who

knows I got the money from you, Peter."

He looked at her gravely. "Thank you," he said, quite as if he considered her speech a tribute. But the next moment his eyes stole an anxious glance at the mirror behind her.

Did he really look so harmless? He could not see that he did. For he looked with his man's eyes and saw what any other man would have seen, that he was young—just thirty—with a big, muscular body, a lean, rugged face and fine fighting jaw. He had no way of knowing how his face changed when turned upon a woman or a child, or anything weaker than himself. The truth was that if he wished to stop women trusting him at sight he would have to get a different pair of eyes to look through those big shell spectacles of his, or a different heart to look through the eyes.

Olive was thanking him and he brought his glance back to hers with a smile.

"I don't want any thanks," he declared. "It's worth the price just to see you again. And to think I came within an ace of not being here tonight. When I saw your name on that announcement I hought I was dreaming."

"Hadn't you heard anything about me from home?"

"Not a word. I'm out of touch with that part of the world. When my mother died I made a bee line for New York. Then I was in Vienna several years, and since then I've been practicing here. By George, Olive, do you realize that it's eight years since we saw each other last? I supposed you had married and settled down in the old town."

"Sometimes I wish I had, Peter."

He laughed. "You do not. Come on; you're tired."

He forbade her to talk during their drive to her hotel, and on their arrival he went in with her to say good night so that she need not use her voice in the wintry air.

"Rather grand, this, isn't it?" she asked of the smart looking hotel lounge. "It's all part of the bluff I have to put up. It would never do, you see, for reporters who wish to interview me about my previous career to find me in a boarding-house."

"That's right. We all have to keep our front painted," Peter agreed. "Hello, isn't that boy

calling your name?"

"Miss Thrace—Miss Thrace," a bellboy chanted through the lounge, then at Peter's signal he veered toward them and they saw that he had a card tray in his hand.

"A reporter already, I'll bet."

Olive took the card in silence, and as she read the name on it her face changed. "No, it's not a reporter," she said. "It's—a—a—"

"I'll beat it," broke in Peter to cover her hesitation. "I'll 'phone you in the morning as soon as I've fixed things. In the meantime, don't worry. Hear me?" He held out his hand.

She gripped it, clinging a little, as if reluctant to have him go. "If I'd only known you were in New York," she said wistfully.

"Well, you know it now, and you're not going to be allowed to forget it," he returned cheerily.

But when he had left her, her parting words still echoed in his thoughts and made him wonder.

CHAPTER VIII

A TALK IN A TAXI

HEN the audience had been dismissed by the manager's announcement that Mr. Zarady was ill and could not go on with the concert one of the first persons to reach the street was Juan Perez. The Brazilian had occupied an excellent aisle seat and had been one of those who started up at the conductor's sudden collapse from the piano stool. He had even taken a step into the aisle to leave immediately, then for some reason sat down again and waited for the formal dismissal. When it came, however, he lost no time in making his way out of the building.

Turning north, he rounded the corner and walked rapidly on to the alley leading to the stage entrance. For a moment he paused to pull his hat brim down and throw his face into shadow; then he approached the door. Its keeper confronted him as he opened it.

"Has Miss Thrace left yet?" Perez asked.

The doorman shook his head. "Any message?"

"No." Perez walked rapidly away, and the doorman indulged in a shrug of disdain. He was

used to such inquiries when the concert soloist was a woman, very famous, or very young and goodlooking like this Miss Thrace. All the poor fool wanted was to see her come out and get into her cab.

Perez returned to the street. But at sight of the swarms of people bent in his direction he retreated again into the darkness of the alley. He appeared then to change his tactics, for, raising his hat brim again, he boldly joined a line of people at the curb who were waiting there hopeful of picking up a cab. Now and again those near him would leave in search of more promising positions and others would fill their places. He stayed where he was. He did not even join in the futile sallies made by his neighbors at sight of every approaching vehicle. As the doorman had predicted, he merely waited. In so far the doorman was right.

For the rest he was wrong. Perez was not waiting for another glimpse of Olive Thrace. His mission was less romantic; he was waiting for her maid. When the woman at last emerged from the alley he wheeled and followed her. Owing to the crowd he could keep almost at her heels without attracting her attention or that of others, and when in the block beyond the crowd began to thin he fell back a few yards. Near the next corner, however, when she turned into a quiet street, she found him at her side.

"Well?" he snapped in an undertone.

She gave a start, but said nothing.

"Well?" he repeated irritably.

"I'm through with this job, Mr. Perez," she brought out in a suppressed but agitated voice. "I've had enough. I want to be paid and quit."

"What's the matter?" he asked, staring at her.

She caught her breath with an audible gulp. "When I took the job to watch that girl you wouldn't tell me what you wanted her watched for—"

"It wasn't necessary."

"I had a right to know the job was dangerous!"

"Sh!" he cautioned, for indignation had caused her tones to soar. "Dangerous? What do you mean?"

"It's just an accident I'm not dead, too—like Zarady."

"Dead!" The man recoiled and stood still. "He's not dead," he contradicted harshly, but his voice shook.

His companian peered at him sharply. "Weren't you there?"

"He's only sick," Perez muttered.

"He's dead, Mr. Perez. And I might have been, too—"

"Sh!" He gripped her arm warningly as people came up behind them. "Come on," he ordered. "Don't talk. We'll get a cab. It's safer. Here's one now." He hailed an approaching taxi. "Now," he went on when they were

seated and the cab was in motion, "tell me what you mean. How do you know he's dead?"

"The man at the stage door said so. And some of the musicians said so too. I asked them. They said he was dead when he was carried off."

"My God!" The cry was barely audible.

"What?" asked the woman.

"Nothing. I didn't speak. Go on." He passed his hand across his face with a nervous movement.

"I thought you said something." She regarded him curiously, and when he shook his head in a second denial she continued to stare at him in the intermittent flashes from the street lamps.

"Well?" he prompted after a moment. "What else did they say?"

She moistened her lips uneasily, still watching him.

"They say he died of heart disease," she answered.

Perez turned his head. "Who says so?"

"The doctors. That's what the musicians told me."

"What else did they tell you?"

"Nothing. I didn't ask them anything else. I thought I'd better not."

"Why?" His tone was cold and composed. He had himself in hand again.

The woman hesitated, disconcerted by the change in him.

"What did you mean by saying it was only an accident that you're not dead too? Well?" His tone sharpened. "What nonsense have you in your head now, Mrs. Balke?"

"It's not nonsense, Mr. Perez," retorted the woman. "There was something in that wine."

"Wine? What wine?"

Mrs. Balke leaned closer. "Then you don't know anything about there being wine in her dressing-room—a bottle of it?" she questioned.

"I?" he snapped. "Of course not. How should I know?"

"Then she did bring it with her! I thought so!"
"What are you driving at? What wine?"
Perez scowled. "Tell me what you know—if you know anything new. And talk fast. I've no time

to waste. What wine?"

"It was in the dressing-room, a bottle of Tokay. Zarady drank some of it. I took a little too—just a little, thank Heaven! But it was enough to put me to sleep so that she had to get a doctor to wake me up. He knew something was wrong, the doctor did. He asked me what I'd been drinking. She hadn't told him, you see; and I didn't tell him, either. The bottle was gone from the tray and I didn't know what to make of that, so I just said I was tired from being up all night. I didn't know, you see, but what——'

"Who was the doctor?"

[&]quot;I didn't hear his name."

"Did anybody else have any of the wine?"

"No; that's what made me suspicious when I heard Zarady was sick—"

"Sick?" He snatched at the word. "You just said he was dead."

"He is, but I didn't know it then. The doctor told me he was sick. He must have thought so himself."

"How could he if Zarady was dead when they took him off?" The Brazilian's eyes glared with suspicion. "Are you lying to me?" he snarled. "You tell me the truth!"

"I'm telling you the truth—he's dead. And it's a wonder I'm not——"

"What became of the wine?"

"I don't know. That's strange, too." Mrs. Balke yawned. "I'm sleepy yet from the stuff," she complained.

"Didn't you say anything to her about it?"

"No. She didn't mention it, so I didn't. I thought it better not to let her guess that I suspected anything. Besides, I'd started thinking. It's not only about the wine that's queer." She paused with a significant glance. "It's what went before."

"What do you mean? Talk fast, woman."

"I mean the way she acted." Mrs. Balke yawned again and her voice trailed off vaguely. "Did I tell you about the letter she got Friday from her sister?"

"Yes, yes." He spoke impatiently.

"It's hard to remember,"—closing her eyes with a murmur of distress.

"It's my head." She leaned back sleepily. "The doctor said I needed air," she murmured.

Perez dropped the window beside him and the cold air surged in. "Come, wake up," he said, shaking her roughly.

She drank in the air and roused herself.

"Now tell me what's happened since I saw you last," commanded Perez.

"Did I tell you about Zarady coming to see her yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, yes, and about her trying to get Garrison on the 'phone afterwards, and about her getting you to pack her trunks for her. What happened after that?"

"I didn't tell you how she acted, because it didn't strike me as funny then. You see, I let Zarady in when he called, then I listened on the stairs after she came down. The bell kept me on the jump so I missed a lot they said, but I know she didn't want to sing tonight and begged him to put it off. And after he was gone I saw her rubbing her mouth as if she wanted to rub her lips off. He'd kissed her, I guess. She 'phoned then, trying to get Garrison—"

"I know all that. Get ahead. I've got to go downtown again tonight."

"Afterwards she went out—did I tell you that?"

"No. Where did she go?"

"I don't know. It was nearly nine o'clock. I thought maybe she went to Garrison's studio; but if she did she didn't see him, I guess, because she rang his number again as soon as she got back, and she kept on trying to get it till midnight. That's one reason I'm so tired now. I stayed up till she went to bed, afraid she might get him and I'd miss what she said to him. This morning she 'phoned again—"

The listener emitted an exasperated oath. "I know all that. What happened after you 'phoned me this evening, after you got to her hotel?"

Mrs. Balke thought a moment, Perez waiting impatiently. "Nothing much happened at the hotel, except I thought it was funny the way she acted, hardly speaking a word while she was dressing. We took a taxi to the concert and when we got there—that was funny, too!" It was when we were crossing the stage to go to her dressing-room. She stopped and said she didn't have any candle in her make-up box and would I go to the drug store for one."

"A candle?"

"To melt the black for her eyebrows. But she didn't need a candle for that, there was gas. It was just an excuse to get rid of me, I see it now, so she could put the wine on the tray and make

it look as if she had found it there. I'm glad I remembered that. It proves she brought the wine, herself."

"Go on, go on. What about Zarady drinking the wine?"

"He drank two glasses of it. He brought Kala into the room and introduced him, and Kala said how glad he was to have her sing on the program with him-only he didn't look very glad to me. Then Zarady saw the wine and laughed and said it was very poor stuff, but he would drink some anyhow to her success. He poured some into the two glasses that were there-water glasses that belonged in the room, I guess—and he offered a glass to her. She passed it on to Kala, and when Kala refused it she set it back on the tray-she didn't drink any. Zarady drank both glasses. He said it was bad luck not to drink wine after it had been poured for a toast. Then the men went out and in a few minutes the concert started. When the first number was nearly over she left the room-it was her turn next-and it was then I took some of the wine. I poured out a little to try it and that was all I had. I didn't like it."

"Why not? Did it make you feel sick?"

"No. I don't remember feeling sick at all, just sleepy. I sat down and—well, the next thing I knew a doctor was standing over me. She wasn't there then, but she came back in a few minutes. I noticed her look at me quick, then at

the doctor, afraid I'd told him about the wine. She asked him to call a taxi for her—just to get rid of him, I thought, and I expected her to say something to me about the wine when he was gone. But she didn't. She just asked me if I was sure I felt all right and said she'd take me home. But I said I'd rather walk. I wanted a chance to ask the doorman about the wine, to satisfy myself that she had brought it, that it hadn't been sent in. I thought it might have been. But the doorman didn't know a thing about it, of course!"

Perez drew a deep breath when Mrs. Balke paused. "Is that all?" he asked heavily.

"Yes."

"All right. I'll have to drop you now. Don't mention a word of all this to anybody, you understand?"

"Of course. I'm no talker, you know that."

"I want to investigate before I decide what to do," continued the man. "There may be nothing in your suspicions. You were sleepy anyway—"

"There was something in the quick way she looked at me and then at that doctor," retorted Mrs. Balke. "And I guess there's something in Zarady being dead."

"Well, keep your opinions to yourself. Have you left that boarding-house?"

"No. I'll leave tomorrow—say I'm sick. I'll not be sorry to quit that job. Slaving in a boarding-house——"

"I make it worth your while, I think," her employer interrupted drily. He rapped on the window at the chauffeur's back, and signalled him to stop the car. "Get out," he said to the woman, "and take another taxi the rest of the way. It's safer."

CHAPTER IX

A VISIT OF CONDOLENCE

EREZ took the additional precaution of changing cabs himself. Entering the uptown hotel whose address he had given at random to his first driver, he made a purchase at the cigar stand for the benefit of any chance observer of his movements, then left the building by a side door, stepped into a taxi that he found there, and five minutes later walked into his club. There, the hope to which he had clung, despite Mrs. Balke, that Zarady was not dead, was quickly dissipated. The Panharmonic concert and its tragic finale were the topics of the hour.

Passing from group to group of acquaintances he stopped at each to listen and watch. Nowhere in word or tone could he detect a suspicion that the death of the famous conductor had been other than a natural one. The doctors' pronouncement had been accepted without question.

Convinced of this Perez wasted no more time, but hurried to the home of Theodore Andrassy. The mingled notes of piano and violin greeted him at the opening of the banker's door and called forth a frown. The everlasting music one heard in that house!

"Is that Mr. Andrassy playing?" he asked of the footman who admitted him.

"No, sir."

"Many people here?"

"A small party, sir."

"I'll go upstairs. Tell Mr. Andrassy privately. He expects me."

"Very good, sir. But I'd better go with you first and turn on the lights."

"I'll find the switch. Deliver my message at once."

Perez found the switch in the upper sittingroom without difficulty, then began to pace the floor, his ready frown coming and going with the troubled progress of his thoughts. At the sound of his host's approach he halted for an instant, then advanced to about ten feet of the door, stopped there and waited, his eyes narrowed.

"You're late," was Andrassy's greeting. "Well?" he questioned sharply when only silence followed.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Perez very quietly.

"Heard?" echoed the other, staring. "What should I have heard? Do you mean—there's a concert?"

"No. You stopped it—as you said you would."

"Ah!" The banker smiled cynically. "The reactions of a woman's heart, my friend, are

like chemical reactions—they never fail. I thought my little plan would go through."

"It went through," assented Perez. The quietness of his tone was now an ominous calm. "Zarady will never conduct another concert—in this world."

"What?" Andrassy's smile of amusement had vanished. "What—do you mean?" he stammered.

"He's dead."

"No! Juan, no! That's not possible."

"He dropped dead about twenty minutes after the concert began." Perez paused a moment. "The doctors have pronounced it heart disease," he added slowly.

The gaze of the older man lost focus. He looked at his visitor without seeing him, and the latter waited. For a full minute the two remained thus in silence, and when Andrassy broke the pause his voice was normal again.

"What is said?" he inquired calmly.

"There is no talk—at the club, at least. I have just been there."

"Then there is none anywhere, unless—the woman Balke, she was to be with the girl tonight, you told me—she should know if there was any talk among the orchestra. See her and——"

"I have seen her," answered Perez, and reported his talk with the woman.

"So," murmured the banker. "So." He fell

silent, digesting what he had heard. Suddenly one finger shot up from his clenched right hand and he spoke one word to match it.

"Kala!"

"Kala?" Perez' expression was blank.

"Watch him! If we have anything to fear it's from that direction. He was in the room and saw the wine, saw Zarady drink it. Talk to him yourself; don't trust anyone. I must know if he suspects. He'll jump at the first chance to make trouble for me."

"How could he connect you with this?" Perez's black eyes were very watchful.

"Zarady may have talked to him to get his consent to the girl's singing tonight, explained how it would spite me. The ape hates me because I have never invited him to play at one of my concerts, and Zarady knew that. But I'll have no more interference with my plans, on that I'm determined. This Garrison affair is going through now to a finish."

"You think—" Perez hesitated; it was not always easy for him to follow his more astute associate's mental processes. "You think Garrison may balk—now?"

"I expect nothing else," was the answer. "The thing is as clear as day to me. Garrison cares nothing about saving the girl's home. It was to save her from Zarady that he consented to go to Brazil. Well, he has saved her from Zarady——"

"What! But Garrison is in Washington."

"He left there at noon, with his passport. Marsh 'phoned me. Garrison has been in New York for hours."

"He didn't see the girl," objected Perez. "Mrs. Balke was with her from seven o'clock on. And her 'phoning his studio last night and this morning shows she didn't know he was out of town. He couldn't have found out where she was without going to the boarding house, and if he had gone there Mrs. Balke would have known of it."

"Would she? She was upstairs in the girl's room, packing her trunks, like a fool, instead of doing what she was paid to do—watch. Your agents are as clever as yourself, my friend. Besides, don't forget that your Mrs. Balke went to a drug store. That leaves another gap in her story. The girl may have seen Garrison then. And she could have seen him at her hotel before Mrs. Balke got there. A fine detective, your Mrs. Balke! Why didn't she leave those trunks and follow the girl? Why didn't she find out why she was being sent to the drug store before she went? She's a fool. Don't use her again."

"She's reliable; she doesn't talk," returned the younger man sullenly.

"Fools are more dangerous than knaves, Perez," said Andrassy, controlling his irritation. "Don't use the woman again. See Kala yourself. We can take no chances now. Garrison is going to Brazil."

"He'd be there now, if I had had my way," the Brazilian declared hotly. "He'd have been there months ago. This scheme of yours, what has come of it? Murder. Yet you wouldn't listen when I wanted to drug Garrison and get him on to a tramp steamer. Afraid it might land us in prison, you said. Where will this land us, do you think? If Zarady told Kala our plot against Garrison, and Kala links that up with the wine and Zarady's death, and Kala hates you as you say—"

"Bravo!" applauded the banker with a grim smile. "I am delighted that you perceive our danger. What you do not perceive, however, is that this little episode of the wine has put into our hands the most powerful weapon we could wish against Garrison."

"You mean—" Perez' eyes had widened.

"Exactly. Kala is the only difficulty. He may know too much. If he does, he must be—managed. See him tonight. We have no time to lose. And keep Mrs. Balke in sight; she may be needed. Now go. I must return to my guests."

Andrassy had moved toward the door as he spoke, but paused now, his hand on the knob.

"If this fails, Juan," he added in a conciliatory tone, "we will try the tramp steamer. Forget what I have said, my friend. I understand your value. We cannot all be alike. You are a man of action, I of intrigue. If intrigue fails again, you shall have your turn. Oh—that doctor, you are sure he suspects nothing?"

"Mrs. Balke was sure."

"Find out his name. We cannot afford to neglect anything."

Perez nodded. "Do you wish me to report to-

night about Kala?" he asked.

"No, at my office in the morning. My butler is a very intelligent man, he might put two and two together."

They went downstairs and parted at the front door without further speech. Alone in the hall, the banker stood in thought, his forehead deeply furrowed. From the drawing-room the voices of his guests reached him plainly, but he appeared to hear nothing. At last he turned and touched a button on the wall. In a moment a door opened and a servant came out.

"My coat and hat," said his master. "And send Franz here."

The man gone, Andrassy looked at his watch, and was just dropping it back into his pecket when Franz's step caused him to turn. The butler advanced along the hall with his soft, unhurried tread and Andrassy waited to speak until he had come up and stood directly before him.

"I am going out, Franz," he said then. "You will make my excuses to my guests and say to them that I have just received bad news concerning my old and very dear friend, Mr. Zarady. He is dead, Franz."

"Indeed, sir?" It was a perfunctory murmur.

The butler's calm face did not change expression. He might have been responding politely to a comment on the weather.

"You will serve supper at once, and request the guests in my name to remain and enjoy it. I shall return very shortly. I—am going to offer my sympathy to Mrs. Zarady. You will say that also."

"Yes, sir. I can reach you there, should it be necessary?"

Andrassy frowned. "No. I don't wish to be disturbed—not on any account," he said shortly. "Besides," he added in a milder tone, "it will not be necessary. I shall return very soon."

"Has a car been ordered, sir?"

"No, I'll take a cab."

The footman arrived now with the coat and hat. Franz held the coat for his master, then passed him the hat.

"You will keep the guests until my return, you understand?" asked Andrassy as he passed through the door, held open by the footman.

"Perfectly, sir," said Franz.

CHAPTER X

AN UNWELCOME SWEETHEART

N leaving the concert hall Rudolf Kala went home, accompanied by his two friends. But at the elevator of his apartment house he insisted on saying good night to them. There was nothing to fear now, he assured them; he had sustained the first shock of his irreparable loss; he would not give way again. He wished only to be alone with his sorrow.

The friends eyed the pale faced youth with lingering concern, but felt it impossible to force their society upon him and reluctantly departed. Their last glimpse through the glass door of the ascending elevator showed him standing with closed eyes, wan and spent.

They would have carried away lighter hearts concerning him could they have followed him, unseen, when he left the elevator. The instant he passed into the hallway leading to his rooms his manner changed. Dejection fell from him like a dropped mantle. His slight form straightened, his head rose, and suddenly a word broke from him as though he could no longer restrain it.

"Free!"

The next instant his shoulders jerked themselves together and he wheeled, his eyes sweeping the hall in alarm. He had heard something, a whisper, like a ghostly echo of his own softlybreathed word.

But there was no one in sight. He looked down the stairway that ran along the wall to his right; it was empty. His imagination had played him a trick, he thought, as he glanced upward, along the railing of the ascending flight of steps.

"Rudi!"

A pair of laughing eyes met his through the banisters. He caught his breath, his face stiffening with anger. But this was lost on the eyes, which had instantly vanished, though only to reappear as the property of a very young girl who sprang from her crouching position on the stairs and darted like a sprite to his side.

"Carola!"

"Oh, Rudi, don't scold," she pleaded in an eager whisper. "I had to come. I had to see you. I couldn't help it—tonight." There was a joyous stressing of the final word. "Oh, Rudi!" she exulted.

"Sh!" He put his hand on her mouth to silence her, then walked on quickly to his door, unlocked it, entered, and paused for her to follow him before he fastened the door.

"You shouldn't have come," he muttered irritably as he switched on a light. "You should

have waited until tomorrow. You should have 'phoned me. We could have met——''

"Rudi—don't scold!" she begged again, the words broken by excited gurgles. "I couldn't wait. Tomorrow seemed a year away. Besides, I'm at school all day on Monday. I just had to see you tonight!" She threw herself into his arms with an ecstatic embrace. "Rudi, he's dead, he's dead!"

"Sh!" the young man cautioned. "Suppose somebody should hear you."

"I don't care who hears," she flung back gaily. "He hated me. We could have been happy months ago but for him. I'm glad he's dead—glad, glad, glad! And so are you, Rudi. You know you are!"

Springing back from him in order to see his face better, she laughed out her accusation again, and when he turned away with a frown and walked on to the adjoining room, dragging off his overcoat as he went, she followed with half-dancing steps, like a child, quite undiscouraged by his lack of response to her mood.

It was indeed very like a child that she appeared, small and slight of build, in a boyish tweed coat, and with short, wavy brown hair that made a fringe between her delicately rounded face and the boyish cap that she wore—a round cap of squirrel skin.

She was taking off her own coat when he stopped her.

"You're not to stay," he said.

"It's not late," she protested.

"I'm tired," he answered ungraciously.

"Oh—" A fleeting doubt seemed to assail her, then: "Poor darling, of course!" she sympathized. "The excitement's made you ill. Come and sit down."

He let her lead him to a sofa in the livingroom where she curled up beside him, her cheek against his arm.

"You're not to stay," he repeated uneasily.

"Oh—just a teeny while, Rudi. Not a soul knows I'm here. I—I sneaked up," she confessed with a gurgle.

"Sneaked up?" He scowled at her. "How?"
"By the stairs. It was such fun!" She sat
back on her curled-up feet and laughed. "You
know that telephone girl? She was very snippy
to me! She looked me up and down when I asked
for you, as if she had her opinion of a girl that
called on a man. Oh, how I wanted to tell her
what a surprise she has in store for her! But all
I said was that I'd wait. And she lifted her
shoulders like this"—with an illustrative shrug—

I wanted to slap her!"

Kala frowned again. "You shouldn't have

"as if she were pushing me right off her universe.

come here and you know it," he exclaimed crossly.

"It was all right, Rudi," declared the girl. "I
went and sat down like a lamb—out in the hall
where she couldn't see me. And then, after a
minute, it occurred to me that you might not come
home alone, and if you didn't you wouldn't want
to find me waiting there. I noticed a side hall
and thought there might be a stairway at the end
of it, because there weren't any steps nearer that
I could see, so when the boy at the door wasn't
looking I slipped down the hall. And there were
steps, as I thought. I knew your room number—
I had noticed it when the operator rang your
'phone, so when I got up here I just hid on the
steps till you came."

"You might have been seen-"

"But I wasn't—so there! And I can go down the same way. So please let me stay a while, Rudi. No one will see me, not even the man at the door, because I don't have to go out his door. That side hall on the ground floor leads to a doctor's office. I saw his name—Dr. Bennett. And there's a door to the side street there. I can go out that way and not be seen at all."

Kala stirred nervously. "Where does your father think you are, Carola?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Carola lightly. "What does that matter now?" She cuddled down beside him with a happy little laugh. "He went out after dinner and I slipped off to the concert.

I just didn't care if he did scold afterwards. I had to hear you play. Poor old father." She sighed comfortably. "He'll never scold again. now that we're to be married."

The young man got up. "You must go home," he said. "He might come here to look for you. You know what he said-"

"But that was because he thought we could never be married."

"We cannot be married now, either—not right away."

"Why not?" She was on her feet with a bound, confronting him. "Why can't we be married right away?"

"Oh, be sensible, Carola," Kala answered, turning from her startled gaze. "We can't be married in a minute—just because Zarady is dead. How would it look?"

"When-" She broke off, biting her lip. The color had fled from her cheeks. "How long must we wait?"

"I-don't know yet. I must-see."

"You promised me that as soon as you were free—as soon as you were strong enough to go against his wishes-"

"I said as soon as I was famous enough," he corrected, moving uneasily about the room. "For a young artist to marry is ruin for his career."

"You said it was he who stood in the way,

not your career. You said you owed him too much to go against his wishes."

"If my career is gone how should we live?"

"We could be married secretly."

He made a gesture of emphatic dissent, but did not reply otherwise, and she waited for a

moment, watching.

"I understand why you wouldn't marry me before," she said finally, speaking with difficulty, one hand against her throat, as if to steady her voice. "He might have found it out and have dropped you. But there's no one to spy on us now. No one need know."

"Everyone would know. When a man is before the public, everything he does is known. We must wait."

"How long?"

"Oh, I can't tell that—exactly. You will have to be patient."

"I can't---"

She broke off, raising the hand at her throat to her lip, which had begun to tremble like a disappointed child's. "I've been patient," she brought out jerkily. "I can't—bear it—any more. Oh, Rudi, you promised!"

"I did not promise for tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow."

She made no answer to that, but stared at him, her face white and still. He stopped at the piano and turned over some sheets of music lying there,

waiting for her to speak. Then before the silence was broken by either of them a telephone bell rang in the next room. Kala drew a breath of relief and without a word of apology went to answer.

"Well? Who? Mr. Perez? Ask him to come right up."

When he returned she was still where he had left her, standing motionless.

"A gentleman is coming up to see me. You must go," he said. "You shouldn't have come anyway. You might have known I'd be all upset. Some other time we'll talk this over again. Now for heaven's sake, be sensible."

He had crossed the room as he spoke and now raised his arms to put them round her for a parting embrace. The movement must have been characteristic, for she shrank away before he touched her.

"You don't want to marry me," she said slowly. "You never meant to marry me. My father was right."

She spoke the words with an odd, rising inflection, half-questioning, half-bewildered, as if feeling her way among strange, incredible thoughts, and when she paused she did not look at him. She seemed forgetful of him, as if she had been thinking aloud.

But he interpreted her speech as a challenge, and his lips opened to deny her charge. Then he appeared to experience a swift change of impulse. His face hardened, his lips set for a moment in a straight, determined line before they opened a second time.

"No, I don't want to marry you," he told her bluntly.

It was a blow in the face. He thought for an instant that she was going to fall. But when he started toward her to catch her swaying form, it stiffened to erectness and she waved him off. Then she turned, sped to the door and was gone.

He waited, not moving, watching the door with narrowed eyes. A full minute passed while he stood there, waiting for her to return. Then, of a sudden, he was at the door and had it open. The hall was empty.

He ran to the stairway and looked down, listening. A faint, far-away patter of hurrying feet came back to him. She had really gone.

Returning to his room he shut the door. His black eyes were bright; he smiled. Then he drew a long, full breath. That was over, too. And how easily!

CHAPTER XI

A FACE IN THE DARK

HE physician's suite in the Ayleshire, occupied by Dr. Bennett, was admirably adapted to its purpose, and was a far more expensive office and residence than Peter could have afforded had he been dependent wholly on his young practice. It was expensive for several reasons. As Peter himself figured it, one third of the rent he paid was for the rooms themselves, one third for the fashionable address, and one third for the private entrance.

This private entrance represented the latest scheme of apartment house architects for the enticement of doctors. By its means patients could come and go without running the gauntlet of the various guardians of the Ayleshire's main portal, around the corner on the Avenue—door-porter, telephone operator and elevator man. In a word, it added one of the advantages of a private house to the conveniences of an apartment. It was moreover a time-saver. Peter stepped out of his machine, crossed the sidewalk, inserted a key, and stood on his own domain. He thought it worth all it cost him.

Consequently, he was rather annoyed that Sun-

day night, when, on returning home after leaving Olive at her hotel, he found his private street door unlocked. He was sure he had not left it so, and as his office attendant was not on duty on Sunday there was no one except himself who could legitimately have used the door. The explanation was, of course, that one of the house employees had done so, not knowing that the door had a dead lock which required a key to secure it. He had had this experience several times before and had attempted to meet the difficulty by keeping locked the door that connected his apartment with the main corridor of the building. But this had not proved practicable, owing to the fact of his mail and packages coming by that route. so he had lodged vigorous complaints with the superintendent and the trespassing had ceased.

No use complaining again, he thought now. Besides, he hated to complain. The only thing to do was to make a repetition of the offense impossible. He would, the very next day, have a safety device of which he had heard put on the lock. This would prevent an uninitiated person from opening the door from within. Not that he minded the use of the door, especially during the day. He minded its being left unlocked at night, for sneak thieves.

Learning from the telephone operator that a call from a patient had come during his absence, he left at once to answer it—having held his car

for such a possibility—and it was not until he was again homeward bound that he was free to think of Olive Thrace and their strange meeting. For it seemed strange to him to have encountered her under such surprising conditions, after years during which he had not even heard of her.

Eight years. It was all of that, for as he recalled her last she had been not more than fifteen or sixteen, just putting up her hair.

He broke into a chuckle as a memory popped into his head, a vision of Olive swinging and singing in her back yard at the full capacity of the swing and of her lungs, while two boys in the yard behind kept up a hooting accompaniment of cat-calls, topping every high note with a hideous yowl.

How imperturbably she had borne their harassment. It was not she, but her tormentors who first tired. From his window next door he had called out a word of praise, and what an astonished stare he had got for it. No doubt, even then as a child, she had felt that absolute confidence in her gift which alone could have led her to stake the family fortune on herself and start out to conquer the world.

Well, the conquest was fairly begun, all but assured indeed. Yet, as his thoughts returned to the present Peter's smile faded. It was that loan—advance she had called it—that Zarady was to have made her that he did not like thinking about.

He could not help recalling in that connection the insinuations he had been forced to listen to before the concert. Of course one had to discount all such gossip as malicious slander. No successful singer or actress escaped it. Still—ten thousand dollars seemed a large sum, under the circumstances. And those flowers; if only a pleasant compliment, why had she flung them away?

An odd thought struck him. Yielding to it he ordered his chauffeur to stop the car and he got out.

"I'll walk, Blaney. Good night," he said, and as he was in the habit of making the last lap of a late trip afoot for the sake of air and exercise his sudden decision brought a simple good night from Blaney and the two went their ways.

Peter's way was to Panharmonic Hall, only a few blocks off. He told himself again and again that his idea was absurd, fantastic, but that it could do no harm to see it through.

The great building was closed and dark. The Kala posters, which had been displayed on either side of the entrance, were already gone, replaced by those of another musician, and the change had the effect of making the tragic event of the evening, not yet two hours away, seem a thing remote and forgotten.

Taking his bearings, Bennett concluded that the window of the dressing-room occupied by Olive Thrace must look north and on to a court between the concert hall and the apartment house adjoining, and that there must be some way of reaching that court, probably from the alley that led to the stage entrance. Accordingly he made his way to the alley, meaning to turn in there and investigate. It was not yet late, not quite ten o'clock, but owing to the cold few people were out and he hoped to escape observation. Luck was against him, however, for just as he neared the alley a policeman stepped into view at the corner ahead and looked toward him.

Instantly he changed his plan, walked out to the corner, passed the policeman, and rounded the block, meaning to try again for the alley. But, as he now approached the entrance to the building for the second time he noticed an "Apartments to Let" sign on the house next door. It gave him a new idea. Entering, he asked to be shown the vacancies.

The colored elevator man, the highest official in evidence, responded to the request in the regular New York way of quoting first the towering rentals, other information being reserved for the dauntless. From the further details which Peter ultimately extracted he learned that there was but one apartment to let with the necessary outlook.

"The bedrooms is da'k," the negro declared discouragingly. "The light's shut off'm by the building next do'."

"There's a court, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir, they's a cou't," was unwillingly conceded, and resigned to his fate the darky took Peter to the second floor, led the way down a corridor, unlocked a door, and touched the light switch in the private hallway of the vacant flat. Hardly were these preliminaries over when the bell in the abandoned elevator summoned shrilly.

"Go ahead; I won't steal the chandeliers," said Peter, and his guide departed.

Congratulating himself on the easy riddance, Peter now wasted not a second. He chose a door which led as he expected into a room on the court, and aided by the light from the hall he found a window, opened it noiselessly, and stuck his head out.

The court was almost black; he could make out nothing. So he took out the pocket torch that he always carried at night. But at the very moment that he adjusted it for use a flash of light from below arrested his action and brought his head back into the room with a jerk. Closing the door at his back to exclude all light, he returned to the window and again looked cautiously out.

Somebody was moving about in the court, a man with a light that darted here and there as if in search of something. Presently the light began to advance steadily in one direction and Peter saw that it was focussed on Olive's discarded roses. Reaching the flowers, the bearer of

the light stooped and lifted them, then remained for several seconds with bent back, looking at the ground. What he was regarding so attentively his observer could not make out, his view being shut off by the roses; but presently the man picked up something and put it in his pocket. Then he replaced the flowers and turned, and was lost in the darkness that followed the final flare of his torch.

On an impulse which he did not wait to weigh, Peter flashed his own light. The stranger below wheeled in a wild, startled way and looked up—involuntarily, no doubt—giving Peter, brief though it was, a full-faced, vivid view of himself. Then there was darkness again while Peter waited, his head within the room, fearing the other should retaliate in kind. However, the darkness remained unbroken, and after a further interval of caution Peter ventured a second flash. The court was empty.

He pulled down the window and left the apartment, encountering the returning elevator man on the way. "Sorry, but I'll have to come in the daytime and see the rooms," he offered by way of excuse and so escaped parley.

In the street once more he hesitated, puzzled, apprehensive—of what he could not have said. Conjectures and fears too vague to analyze were forming at the back of his head. His mind bristled with unanswerable questions.

At the corner he hesitated again, then walked on to the alley. The block was empty, not a living creature in sight. Now if ever was his chance to reach the court unnoticed. A possibility remained that the man he had seen there might still be lurking about, but the danger of that seemed to him remote. At any rate, he would risk it.

He checked his pace as he neared the alley; then, with a swift glance about, he disappeared within it, feeling confident that he had not been seen, yet with his heart pounding uncomfortably at his ribs. He was wondering what explanation he would offer should it happen that he had been observed and followed.

As he expected, there was a passage from the alley skirting the rear of the building, and after one investigating flash from his lamp he dispensed with light until he had reached the court to which the passage led. Even there he waited for a minute in darkness, listening.

To his right, far above in the upper stories of the apartment house, were several lighted windows, but the light from them scattered and was lost before it reached the ground. To his left, the big music hall projected an unbroken gloom. Hearing nothing, he finally pressed his torch and swept the court with light; then he moved on to the bunch of roses. And before he had reached them he knew what lay beneath, for he felt the crunch of glass under his feet.

He held the flowers to one side, as his predecessor had done, and looked down at the remains

of the wine bottle they had concealed. The bottle had been thrown out with wine still in it, for there was a yellowish ice coating over several square feet of the concrete floor of the court, and in one or two fragments of the glass a few drops of wine had frozen. Picking up the piece with the label he noted the latter closely. On it was the name of the brand of wine, Hungarian Tokay—Máslás Szeged—and below, the name and address of the local retailer from whom it had been purchased.

But what was it the man had carried away? Finding no clew to this puzzle, Peter replaced the flowers over the glass, made his way out of the place, and hurried home.

There his first care was to make a note of the name and address of the wine dealer and of the brand of the wine. That he should ever have occasion to use this information he considered all but impossible; but in the midst of his bewilderment it was a satisfaction to have some concrete data in hand.

For a long time then he sat thinking, trying various theories and discarding them. Again and again the face of the unknown in the court rose vividly before him. That it was a young face was the one definite fact which he could have affirmed of it. Whether the stranger was dark or fair he did not know, nor could he have described a single feature. But on one point he was confident; he should recognize the face were he ever to see it again.

CHAPTER XII

THE FACE AGAIN

N awakening next morning Peter lay for a few minutes reviewing the previous evening's history. He had gone to sleep with the comforting hope that everything would look different to him by daylight, but he found himself now as troubled and perplexed as he had been before. However, churning things over in his mind got him nowhere; and he welcomed the arrival of his morning paper.

Zarady's death was given large headlines and considerable space, chiefly taken up with biographical matter. The conductor, it appeared. was forty-seven years old, an Austrian by birth, and had been for eleven years the most distinguished orchestral leader in the United States. also a man of international reputation.

"He was well known," the account went on to say, "for his encouragement of young musicians. A number of noted singers owe to him the auspicious beginnings of their careers, and it is a touching circumstance of his death that it occurred in the very act of his successfully launching another brilliant young protégée, Miss Olive Thrace, a Southern singer of rare promise."

On another page of the paper Peter found the regular notice of Olive's debut, as complimentary and encouraging as could be desired. The audience had been justifiably enthusiastic, the critic said. No doubt all the papers were equally favorable, thought Peter, and probably at that very moment Olive was reading them and rejoicing in her success.

But, somehow, the effort to conjure up a jubilant Olive failed utterly. That look in her eyes when he left her, those last regretful words, haunted Peter still. Something had been wrong, very wrong, for her last night. Of that much, at least, he was certain.

At ten o'clock he was at his bank arranging to have the money wired south for the taking up of the Thrace mortgage, and when the transaction was completed he telephoned to Olive.

"Just wanted to let you know that I've arranged the little matter we spoke of last night," he said, choosing words to evade the comprehension of the hotel operator should she be listening. Olive, however, gave no heed to possible listeners.

"Little!" she broke in gratefully. "Oh, Peter, I can never thank you——"

"Will you lunch with me?" he interrupted in turn. "There are a few details I want to explain and I'm due now at my office. Everything is settled. I just want to—to tell you about it."

The words were inane; the last thing he wanted

was to talk about the service he had done her. What he wanted was to see her, to rid himself if possible of that feeling of apprehension concerning her.

She replied that he must lunch with her and he agreed to the amendment. "Everything all right?" he questioned then. "I mean, are you feeling all right?" he added hastily, fearful lest the first phrasing of his inquiry should strike her as odd.

"I'm feeling grateful," she answered, "so grateful that there isn't room to feel——"

"All right," he cut in. "I'll let you tell me about that after lunch—maybe."

"Oh, I'm going to tell you—no maybe about it!" she retorted with a laugh.

"All right. Good-bye," he called back happily.

He left the telephone booth with a springing step and a smile for the world at large. That laugh of hers had lifted a weight from his spirits. He did not know, it was true, any more than he had before why she had thrown a bottle of wine out of the window and fibbed to him afterwards. But as long as she could laugh like that it didn't matter why.

His first glance at her when they met was equally reassuring. She was radiant. He told himself that her previous depression had been due to the possible loss of her home; anyhow, he was going to let it go at that and give himself up to the enjoyment of the hour.

They met in the reception room of her hotel where other luncheon parties were assembling, and only words of greeting were exchanged between them, and even when they were seated at a secluded corner table they smiled silently at each other for a moment or two before either spoke.

In a simple blue dress with dainty white collar and cuffs, the girl was a satisfying sight for any eyes. She wore no hat, and with her lovely fair hair drawn softly back from her forehead, and her cheeks and lips free of the make-up they had worn for the stage, she looked convincingly like his little neighbor of eight years before.

"You don't look a day over eighteen, Olive," he said, ending the pleasant pause. "But inside information on the subject tells me you must be."

She laughed, then grew serious. "If I look eighteen it's because you've taken six whole years off my shoulders and off my heart, Peter," she answered.

"I said after lunch," he reminded her.

"Seeing you carries me back so," she said. "When I think how ignorant I was of what I was doing when I took my mother's money, when I consider the awful risk—for her, not myself—I'm appalled. How could she ever have let me?"

"Let you?" He gave an amused laugh.

"Yes, I did make her, I suppose," she admitted. "Of course I did, I know it. That's why I feel so responsible. She and Mary were satisfied to go on forever as they were, living in the old house and the old town till they died. I wasn't."

"Of course you weren't. You had a voice and wanted to use it."

"Yes, and I thought a voice was all that was needed." She glanced away, her face clouding.

"Whatever else you needed you had, Olive,"

he returned. "You've justified yourself."

Her eyes came back to his, still serious. "Not yet, but I hope to," she answered. "I hope to go straight ahead now and to be able to repay you—"

"Olive, please! If you knew how happy it made me."

"But I must thank you," she insisted. "Though there aren't any words to tell you how grateful I am."

"I know. I understand," he said. "Now let's forget it. Did you see your notice in the Recorder?"

She nodded. "All the critics were nice to me. And I've signed the contracts for my concert tour. Mr. Unwin, the manager wants me to start out at once, to take advantage of the free advertising, as he calls it, that Mr. Zarady's death has given me. But it seems horrible to me to make

capital of such a thing." She closed her eyes with a shudder "Poor Zarady."

"How is that maid today, have you heard?"
Peter asked.

"No, and I don't know what to think about her," said Olive. "I 'phoned to my old boarding-house to ask about her this morning, but she wasn't there. They said she had sent word she was sick and asked to have her things sent to her by her messenger. I got the address she gave and went to it, because I felt rather worried about her. But the number was that of a vacant lot. I thought I must have misunderstood, so I 'phoned again, but it was the number she had given. I—don't know what to make of it."

Peter was silent. He did not know what to make of it, either, and it recalled to his mind other things that puzzled him. He looked hard at Olive, but that she was sincere he could not doubt. The impulse came to him to speak out and tell her frankly how perplexed he was, but he shrank, somehow, from putting his vague disquietude into words.

Then with the arrival of the first course of their luncheon, his mind was distracted from everything else by a ring on Olive's left hand, which came into view for the first time as she opened her napkin.

"Does that solitaire mean what it says?" he asked.

She nodded, flushing a little.

"Who is he?"

"Anthony Garrison, an artist. Come to dinner tomorrow evening and meet him."

"Delighted."

"I do hope you'll like each other, Peter."

"I'm sure we shall," said Peter cheerfully.

"We're not to be married for ever so long, not till we're both on our feet a bit. Tony paints portraits. It has been hard sledding for both of us. But I'm not complaining. I've been very—lucky."

There was something in her tone that made Peter look at her inquiringly, but she did not explain, and he said then that in his opinion there was no such thing as luck, that she had earned her success.

She shook her head. "Some day I'll tell you why I say I'm lucky," she said.

Then they talked of other things, of the old home and old friends. An hour passed quickly and before he realized the flight of time Peter found himself in danger of being late for an appointment. Nevertheless, he waited at Olive's request while she answered a telephone summons that came as they were leaving the restaurant.

"Oh do wait," she begged excitedly. "If it's what I think I must tell you before you leave."

She was gone but three minutes and returned with shining eyes. "What do you think?" she

exclaimed. "But you'll never guess. I'm to sing at Theodore Andrassy's!"

"Andrassy, the banker?"

"Yes. Oh, Peter, you don't seem to realize what an honor that is! You ought to congratulate me. I begin to believe that I have really arrived. Andrassy never asks anybody that hasn't. His secretary called up just before you came and I referred him to Mr. Unwin. That was Mr. Unwin at the 'phone. He's in the seventh heaven over it himself. Now admit I'm lucky!"

"I can't see any luck in it. You made a hit last night, that's all. Is that what you promised to tell me some day to prove that you're lucky?"

She was silent a moment, the light of happi-

ness fading from her eyes.

"No, I didn't mean this," she said. "But—well, whatever I meant, isn't finding you again, just when I needed you so badly, proof of my luck? And I'll tell you this," she went on, recovering her high spirits, "I mean to make the most of you while I have the chance, because I know very well you'll lose all interest in me the minute I really get on my feet. I know you, Peter. I know how you love anybody or anything down and out. Do you remember those awful animals you always had about? How your mother ever stood it, with all those mangy, limpy creatures on the place, I don't know. Never a

decent looking one in the lot, because the minute one got well you gave it away. Not because you wanted to make somebody a present, but because anything that didn't need doctoring bored you. Is that the way you treat your patients—forget them as soon as you've cured them?"

"No, they forget me—till they're sick again."
"I shan't, sick or well, rich or poor—just reconcile yourself to that. But I'm keeping you. Good-bye. Tomorrow for dinner, don't forget."

He left her at the elevator and hurried toward the street door, reflecting amusedly on her characterization of him. For it was as true as truth, he knew, that the more people needed him the more they interested him. Well, he was glad she realized that; she would feel her obligation to him less; but as for losing interest in her——

His thoughts snapped off. A face, an unexpected, astonishing image, had suddenly confronted him through the glass of the revolving door. It was the face of the man he had seen in the court.

Completing the full circuit of the door, Peter followed the stranger across the lounge to the desk.

"Please announce me to Miss Thrace—Mr. Garrison," he presently heard him say.

Garrison! Peter took a long, comprehensive survey of the young man, forgetful for the moment of everything about him except that he was the man Olive was in love with. Well, an all

right enough sort of chap, apparently.

As he retraced his steps to the exit Peter's head buzzed again with questions. Had Olive sent Garrison to that court? If so, why? And what was it he had picked up and put in his pocket?

CHAPTER XIII

A PUZZLING CALLER

AN'S inability to forecast the future is generally admitted to be a wise arrangement of Providence, though no man ever lived who did not long for the power to see ahead at critical moments of his life—moments he believed to be critical. For just there lies difficulty; the real crises of life rarely reveal themselves as such until afterwards—long afterwards, usually.

Take Dr. Bennett's case for an instance. When he returned to his office that afternoon and found a locksmith at work on his door, the sight caused him unalloyed satisfaction. That clever safety catch on his lock would prevent the use of the door by those without right thereto, would protect him from thieves, and would save him the need of complaining to the house superintendent.

Thus he viewed the matter, in his human blindness. Yet he was destined within the week to wish he had never heard of that ingenious device which he now so highly valued. Within a month, to be sure, he would be glad again that he had; and before the year was out he would be calling down blessings on the head of its inventor. All

of which proves once more the wisdom of Providence.

And if he could not see that the thread of his own destiny ran through a keyhole, so to speak, neither could he see that Olive's did. He was, in fact, not thinking of Olive, having positively decided to call a halt on his thoughts in her direction. Time, no doubt, would solve whatever mystery there was, or seemed to be, involved with her affairs.

His resolution was sensible enough; but it soon became evident that he was going to have to think about Olive and her affairs whether he chose to or not. Toward the close of his afternoon office hour Miss Ames, his office attendant, ushered into his presence a man whom he did not recall ever having seen before. Taking the visitor for a new patient, he made a tentative diagnosis of his case before a word had been spoken by either.

The stranger was nearing middle age, with hair already graying above his harassed brows. He was pale and thin, his manner was nervous, and his clothes just noticeably below par as to neatness. Another poor devil caught in the vicious circle of a chronically weak will and failing physical strength.

"I'm not a patient, doctor," began the caller apologetically. "And I shouldn't have come at your office hour, I know, but I'll not take more than a minute of your time. My name is—Gar-

ford." There was a perceptible pause before the name.

"Sit down, Mr. Garford," Peter said kindly, though he groaned inwardly with the conviction that the man was a book agent whose next move would be to extract a carefully concealed prospectus of his wares from an inside pocket. "What can I do for you?"

"I—I'd like to ask a few—questions, doctor," faltered Mr. Garford, taking the proffered chair. "You were at the Panharmonic concert last night,

I think?"

"Yes." Peter's patient gaze changed to one of wonder.

"And you went back on the stage when they called for a doctor?"

"Yes."

"What is your opinion about Zarady's death?"

"My opinion? I don't understand."

"As to the cause of death, I mean."

"I understood the cause to be heart failure---"

"Heart failure!" There was an exasperated edge to Garford's tone. "Everybody dies of heart failure."

There was a pause before Peter answered. His impulse was to reply to the peevish outburst by demanding his visitor's right to come unbidden to his office and fire questions at him. But it was so evident that Garford was laboring under a

nervous strain that he thought it better not to irritate him.

"Heart disease, I meant, of course," Peter said quietly. "But I know nothing about the case at first-hand. Mr. Zarady was never a patient of mine. Why have you come to me?"

"The man at the stage door gave me your name," was the answer. "He said you were there and took Miss Thrace home in your car, and—I thought you might have heard from her if—if there was any talk going on."

"Talk?"

"Yes. A sudden death always looks suspicious, doesn't it?"

"To some people, perhaps," conceded Peter. "However, I heard nothing from Miss Thrace about talk of that kind. Has there been any?"

"Well—I don't know that there has," Garford returned evasively. He looked hard at Peter, seeming to debate some question with himself, as if tempted to speak his mind fully but doubtful of the wisdom of doing so. Suddenly, to Peter's disappointment, he shifted his attack.

"You didn't examine him yourself, I suppose?"

he asked.

"I? No. He was already dead when I got there."

"Who did examine him?"

"I don't know," Peter hesitated, then: "Why don't you go to Zarady's regular physician?" he

asked. "That is, if you have the proper authority to make an investigation."

"Oh, I have authority," said Garford with an air of importance. "I'm with the Universal Life Insurance Company. Of course, doctor, this is confidential," he added hastily with belated caution. "It's a matter of form for us to investigate the sudden death of a policy holder—a mere matter of form. But I oughtn't to have been so open with you. I'd not like it to get back to the office."

He paused with an apprehensive gaze at Peter, waiting for an assurance that what he had said would go no further, and when none came he said, "There'll be no trouble for anybody, you know. The company will pay the claim. It is just a matter of form for us to investigate."

"I see," said Peter, though he really saw nothing except that some comment was expected from him. He was considerably puzzled. That life insurance companies did make it their custom to inquire into cases of sudden death among their policy holders he believed; but that such inquiries were the regular business of the man before him he did not credit for an instant.

Garford stood up. "I won't take any more of your time, doctor," he said. "Just thought you might have—heard something." He turned away with a worried sigh, then suddenly looked back: "You don't happen to be acquainted with Rudolf Kala, do you?"

"No." Peter wondered what was coming now.

"Thought you might. He lives here."

"In this house? I was not aware of it."

"Well, it's a big house," said Garford wearily, as if the size of the Ayleshire were an additional burden to those he already carried. "Sorry to have troubled you; but it's merely a matter of form, you understand?"

"I understand," said Peter.

But the instant his caller had left the room he pressed the bell button on his desk twice, in signal to Miss Ames not to disturb him until further notice, and after a brief deliberation he looked up the telephone number of the Universal Life Insurance Company and called it.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Garford," he said, when a girl's business-like voice responded.

"Mr. Garford? Just a minute."

The minute passed. "What is it?" asked a girl's voice again, a different girl.

"I want to speak to Mr. Garford."

"Garford? What department is he in?"

"I don't know."

"Hold the wire. I'll give you-

He held the wire for what seemed five minutes, then: "Is it Doctor Garford you want?"

"No," said Peter, after reflecting.

"There's no Garford connected with the company except Dr. Garford, one of our medical examiners. He is out just now. Any message?"

"No, thank you."

So Garford was a doctor. That let in the light. The thing was clear enough now. Garford was the medical examiner who had passed Zarady as a good insurance risk—recently, perhaps. In consequence, his employers' wrath had now descended upon him. He was probably afraid of losing his job, and was making a desperate effort to save himself by proving that Zarady's death was not a natural one.

As a doctor Garford was easy to classify. He had been a rolling stone, never remaining in one place long enough to build a practice, vacillating between private and institutional work until youth was gone. The loss of his present berth would be a serious matter at his age. No wonder he meant to make a fight.

Obviously, however, he was receiving no encouragement from his company; obvious too that he had as yet no evidence to back his hopes. Still, who could say what misleading facts he might not stumble on? Circumstances had such a devilish way sometimes of seeming to prove what was not true. Peter thought of the circumstances over which he had been puzzling. Suppose Garford were to get hold of a few things like that?

However, nothing could be done about it, so far as he could see, so he rang for his next patient.

CHAPTER XIV

THREATS THINLY VEILED

HE familiar voice of Miss Ellis, the house operator, came over the wire to Peter that evening about ten o'clock, just after he returned home from a call.

"Dr. Bennett, can you go upstairs right away to see Mr. Rudolf Kala, in Six B?" Miss Ellis asked. "I've been trying to get you for him since eight o'clock."

A startled pause at Peter's end, then he said, "He is not a patient of mine. Why didn't you call Dr. Simpson?" Simpson was the other physician resident in the building.

"I did suggest him, but Mr. Kala wouldn't have him. He won't have anybody but you, doctor. And he's been so impatient. Shall I tell him you're coming?"

"Wait a minute. How long has he been liv-

ing here?"

"Only a few weeks. He's a sub-tenant in Mrs. Craig's apartment. Perhaps she recommended vou, doctor."

"All right. Tell him I'll be up presently."

Peter turned from the telephone with the odd feeling that this summons from Kala was what he had been expecting, the thing that for hours, ever since Garford's visit, he had been vaguely waiting for. Garford, he had felt sure, would set some sort of ball rolling.

Kala was of course not ill at all. If he had been any other doctor would have done him as well as Peter, of whose existence he had probably not been aware until made so that afternoon by Garford. Garford was the connection. He must have gone to Kala straight from Peter's office. What for? And why did Kala now want to see Peter? Why did he conceal that desire under a

pretense of illness?

"I am in here, doctor," a voice called weakly in response to Peter's ring at the door of Six B, and following the voice Peter passed through the living-room to the chamber beyond. It was a road he had traveled before, during the occupancy of the regular tenant, and it struck him now that the grand piano which had been added to the furnishings was like a huge, three-legged monster sprawling there. Equally an invader did the pianist himself appear in the dainty bedroom, rumpling the delicate silk bed coverlet on which he had stretched himself, half-dressed. Happy Mrs. Craig, sunning herself in ignorance in Florida!

"My head, doctor," complained the young man, after a sharp glance at Peter from under his lowered eye-lids.

Peter drew up a chair. "Where does your head hurt?" he asked, feeling his patient's pulse.

"Oh-all over."

"Bothered much with this sort of thing?"

"Yes-no, not much-sometimes."

"I see," said Peter, dividing his attention between the second hand of his watch and the pale, tense face of the musician, who appeared even younger at close range than on the stage—not more than twenty-three.

"Let me see your tongue."

Kala sat up. "My tongue is all right," he declared impatiently. "It—it's my heart, doctor. I am worried—terribly. Some day I may drop dead, who knows—in a minute!"

"What reason have you for thinking your heart is not strong?" Peter inquired in as casual tone as he could manage with those black, hawk-like eyes fixed on him, as if watching for something. "Ever troubled with shortness of breath, or palpitation?"

Kala frowned. "I wish to be examined. I wish to be examined carefully," he said.

He sank back to his pillow and lay, scowling and silent, while Peter applied the stethoscope and listened to the beating of the heart beneath it, a sound organ if ever there was one, functioning a little too rapidly, perhaps, but that was easily accounted for by the youth's excitement. To what the excitement was due was not so clear.

"You needn't worry about your heart," Peter announced presently. "Now, about your headache—"

"Never mind that," the patient interrupted, sitting up again, a determined gleam in his eyes. "You say I needn't worry about my heart, but the doctors said that to Zarady also. Then when he is dead they say it is from his heart."

Peter was putting away his stethoscope and took advantage of the fact to consider his reply. Was Kala's concern about himself genuine and due, as he implied, to Zarady's death, or was that merely a pretext?

"I know nothing whatever about Mr. Zarady's case," he answered, "but for yourself——"

"You were there last night!" Kala broke in. "I saw you."

"Yes, I was there," returned Peter, speaking as quietly as before, convinced, however, that Kala had not seen him but had learned of his presence on the stage from Garford. "But I did not examine Mr. Zarady's body or talk to any of the doctors who did. I know only what was in the papers. It may be true, as you say, that Mr. Zarady was ignorant of his condition, true also that the doctors made a mistake."

"You mean he died from something else?" Kala flashed back.

"No. I mean that the doctors who examined him from time to time may either have been wrong

as to his condition or have kept the truth from him. Dying as he did leaves no doubt that the cause was heart disease."

"Then people cannot die like that, in a minute, from—anything else?"

"Not normally. In an accident, of course---"
"Or-murder?"

Peter met squarely the tense stare of the black eyes, but his pulse quickened. "We were discussing natural causes," he answered evenly. "Do you wish me to give you something for your headache?"

"No—yes," muttered the pianist; then when the prescription was written and Peter had risen to leave he flung out at him impulsively: "There are people that think Zarady did not die of heart disease."

Peter deliberately folded the prescription. "Shall I send this to a drug store for you or—"

For answer Kala thrust out his hand and took the paper. "Zarady was insured for his life, and now the company will not pay maybe till they know if he died of heart disease or—something else."

"I have heard that they are investigating the case," said Peter, "but that is only customary. It doesn't mean that they are suspicious."

"They are suspicious!" The black eyes widened, then narrowed again. "And if the man who

goes about speaking of this makes trouble for—somebody, maybe if somebody knows something he must tell it."

Peter made no reply to this enigmatic remark, for he was at a loss what to say. Kala's expression showed plainly that there was a hidden meaning in his words, that the words were indeed a covert threat.

"You are a friend of Miss Thrace, I think?" he said abruptly, with a change of tone. "Ah, what a beautiful voice she has! Zarady wished to make for her a career. What a pity for her he died!"

"I dare say his interest in her career would have been of great benefit," said Peter coldly.

"Indeed, yes! A pity. Let us hope nothing else will happen to stop her career. A most charming person. I was with Zarady in her dressing-room last night. She had some wine there for him, Tokay. He has been always a lover of good Tokay. But this was not good. It was very bad Tokay, the worst in the world, I think. But Zarady drank it, two glasses, for her success. Poor man, he will drink no more Tokay."

Peter's face had become rigid with his effort to show no astonishment at what he heard, to betray no understanding of its import.

"You do not like it that I speak of Miss

Thrace," said Kala, with a derisive smile. "Do you not know she is fiancée to Anthony Garrison, the artist?"

"Yes, I know it," Peter managed to answer lightly. "I have known Miss Thrace since she was a child."

"Indeed?" murmured Kala. "Please beg her to accept my sympathy. But perhaps she is not too sorry that Zarady is dead, for she has now not to pay for her success. If he had not died then she would have had to pay—like the others. She knew that. For a long time she said no to him, because she loved Garrison; but at last she said yes. Now she has made a success and still need not pay, because he is dead. Is she not lucky, doctor?"

The word "lucky" struck Peter unpleasantly. It was the word Olive had used. Had she meant what Kala meant?

"What a pity now if anybody makes trouble for her," continued the pianist. "This man from the insurance company is very stupid, and stupid

people make great trouble sometimes."

"The insurance company is making its inquiry merely as a matter of form. They are not going to make trouble for any one," answered Peter, seeking to allay Kala's apprehension which was very evident, though of what he was apprehensive was not clear. Whatever it was it was on his own account, not Olive's. "Now, as to that head-

ache of yours," continued Peter. "I think it will be gone by morning. It will not be necessary for me to come again."

"No, it will not be necessary for you to come again—I think," said Kala, with his narrow smile, and taking the prescription between his fingers he twisted it and tossed it across the room.

"Better keep it," Peter advised lightly, determined not to betray annoyance at anything. "You may have another headache some day and that will save you a doctor's bill."

"I have never had a headache in my life," Kala retorted insolently.

"Good night," said Peter. "I'm glad to have been able to reassure you about your heart. You need not worry about it any more."

"No, I shall not worry about that, doctor." There was a distinct emphasis on the "that." "Good night."

Back in his office, Peter paced the floor. What ought he to do? Kala evidently expected him to stop Garford's investigation, for Olive's sake. And if he did not do so and Garford made trouble for Kala, then Kala would make trouble for Olive—trouble connected, somehow, with the bad Tokay that Zarady had drunk in her dressing-room shortly before his death. This threat was what the recent conversation boiled down to. It was to tell him this that Kala had summoned him.

What sort of trouble did Kala fear from Garford's inquiry? Were there suspicious circumstances connected with Zarady's death that involved him, and that he feared Garford would bring to light? He had pronounced Olive lucky to be free of Zarady. How about himself? Peter recalled the remarks he had overheard at the concert about Kala's dependence on Zarady's good will. Was the conductor's death not as great a release for him as for Olive?

But what could he, Peter, do about it all? Try to call off Garford? That would only rouse the latter's suspicions. Warn Olive? He could not imagine himself broaching the subject to her. He might speak to Garrison, who also knew about the wine.

Yes, he could go to Garrison. But it would be better not to do so until after he had met him formally at Olive's dinner and had an opportunity to take his measure. The dinner was only twenty-four hours off, not too long to wait. Until then he would do nothing.

One thing he did do, in the meantime. He paid a visit to the wine dealer whose address he had got from the broken bottle in the court. While returning next morning from a professional call it occurred to him that he was near the place and that it could do no harm to stop there, though he could imagine no way in which the visit was likely to serve him.

The store was small and inconspicuous, and its fat, Hungarian proprietor was its sole occupant when Peter entered.

"I want a small bottle of this wine." Peter presented a written memorandum of the wine's

unpronounceable name.

"Um." The dealer raised round, friendly eyes from the paper and regarded his customer curiously for a moment. He seemed on the point of offering some comment, but changed his mind and waddled off to the back of the store and disappeared from sight. Then his voice was heard calling to an assistant downstairs.

"Louis! Louis! Bring me yet up a bottle of that Máslás Szeged. Yes, another." He laughed. "A small one."

A second laugh came now in answer to something heard from below, and was repeated again when steps sounded on the stairs. A broad smile still lingered on the proprietor's countenance when he came back with the wine to Peter.

"This wine has a good sale, I see," said Peter, to start a conversation.

"Um—well——" The Hungarian broke off and pursed his lips. "No, not so good," he went on. "That is why my boy he laughed. Not a bottle of Máslás Szeged do we sell since two years —three maybe. My Louis he must hunt all over when a lady she come Saturday night for a bottle. Then yesterday morning comes a man, and now you yet. Is funny, how it goes in business, yes?"

Peter had taken the bottle, and, to gain time, was comparing the label with his memorandum.

"The man he had the name written also," remarked the Hungarian idly. "But the lady not."

"Perhaps she was Hungarian."

The dealer smiled. "No, I do not think she could be Hungarian and buy Máslás Szeged," he answered.

"Why not? Isn't it a good wine?"

"Um—well—it is not the best Tokay. If you want good Tokay I like better you take another brand. You are a new customer and I like to please you. You come again maybe."

A hopeful smile accompanied this suggestion and Peter smiled back cordially. "Did the lady let you persuade her to buy something else instead of this?" he asked.

"The lady? The young lady who was Saturday night here? No, she took this." The dealer laughed deprecatingly. "The young man also."

"Then I'll take a chance on it," said Peter. "If I don't like it I'll take your advice next time."

"I give you along my catalogue."

At the door on leaving with his package Peter paused for a final question. "Do you keep open late on Saturday night?"

"Ten o'clock," was the answer.

Peter put the bottle of wine on a back shelf in his office closet without unwrapping it, regretting that he could not dispose as easily of his anxious thoughts. Was Olive the young lady who bought the wine on Saturday night? Who was the second purchaser, the young man? What did he want with it on Monday? And why, by all that was puzzling, had they bought that particular brand of Tokay—the worst in the world, according to Kala?

CHAPTER XV

SUSPICIOUS PROSPERITY

As it turned out Peter did not make the acquaintance of Anthony Garrison on Tuesday, as he had expected to do. About noon Olive telephoned requesting a postponement of their dinner until the following evening, because she feared she might be late in returning from Zarady's funeral. After that Peter heard nothing more from her until Wednesday afternoon when he in turn asked to have their engagement shifted to Thursday to make way for an operation at which he wished to be present.

"Everything all right?" he inquired when the

matter of the dinner had been adjusted.

"As right as rain," she replied happily. "Mr. Andrassy has just been here to talk over my program for his concert Saturday night. Such a wonderful man!"

"Is he?" said Peter, to whom the banker was only a name. "I saw in the paper this morning that Rudolf Kala is also to play at that concert of his."

"Yes," she answered. "You see, Mr. Andrassy was a great friend and admirer of Zarady, and he wants the concert to be a sort of memorial to him.

We are to do some of Zarady's own compositions, and Mr. Andrassy feels that as we were both protégés of Zarady our interpreting his music will be a sort of additional tribute to him. That shows the sort of person Mr. Andrassy is, Peter—I mean his putting the thing to me that way. Because I am sure he is having us just because he thinks it will help our careers, and for that reason would have pleased Zarady. I think it wonderfully kind and generous, don't you?"

Peter conceded that Andrassy must be a very decent sort.

"Because," she further elucidated, "Mr. Unwin, my manager, says Mr. Andrassy has never had Kala to play before—didn't consider him important enough. And he certainly can't think I am, either. It's for Zarady's sake, of course. But I'll not keep you, Peter. Please don't let anything interfere with our dinner tomorrow night. Tony is so anxious to meet you—to thank you."

"Now look here, Olive," said Peter. "Unless it is distinctly understood that there is one topic absolutely barred from the conversation I'm not coming. You hear?"

"What did you tell him for, anyhow?" he demanded.

"Oh, Peter! I had to tell him!"

"I don't see why."

"Because he knew how I was placed, and if I hadn't told him how I got out of my difficulty he

-might have thought-all sorts of things. You don't really mind, do you?"

"Of course not. Are you getting so famous you can't see a joke?" Peter bantered. "There's only one thing I mind, and you know what that is."

"All right. I won't talk about it any more. But that won't mean that I'm not feeling grateful."

"You're hopeless," he laughed. "Good-bye." Thursday passed without event, as had the two preceding days, and Peter gave a relieved sigh when he entered Olive's hotel that evening. For he had worried a bit over the delay. Still, his donothing policy had apparently done no harm so far, and now that he was to meet Garrison he would be able to decide definitely whether to tell him about Garford and Kala or to continue passive in the affair.

Garrison was with Olive in her small sittingroom when Peter was ushered in, and with the
first clasp of the artist's hand Peter liked him.
It was as if the contact of palm with palm had
worked some sort of magic. Peter's doubts suddenly evaporated, the feeling of suspense fell from
him, and he had the pleasurable sensation of one
awakening from a bad dream to find his room
flooded with sunlight. Garrison's clear glance,
his frank smile, the warm, sincere pressure of his
hand made Kala and Garford seem as negligible as
a pair of noisy mosquitoes.

It was not until dinner was half over that Peter began to notice that he and Olive were doing all the talking. Garrison's smile and occasional murmur of assent were so ready that his silence was not conspicuous. But having finally noted it, Peter noted too that the artist's face in repose looked drawn and tired.

He remarked this latter fact for the first time during a eulogy of Theodore Andrassy delivered by Olive, and he fancied that her praise of the banker did not please her fiancé. The latter sat with lips drawn into a tense line, as if held shut by sheer force of will. Was he jealous of Andrassy? Small wonder if he were at least envious of a man so rich, so able to offer a woman what he himself could not.

However, the conversation was for the most part impersonal, of music and art, the opera and the theatre. Again and again Peter drew Garrison into the discussion, watching him all the time as closely as he would have watched a patient, making note of each familiar symptom of nervous strain that the artist unconsciously betrayed to him.

That Garrison had something on his mind, he was convinced. But what? Certainly it was nothing shameful or criminal, and as for Kala's insinuations, to repeat them to Garrison Peter felt would be an insult.

However, he did tell him of them, as it turned

out. That was on Saturday, after the second talk with Garford. It was, in fact, that second appearance of Garford that Peter ever afterwards looked back to as the beginning of the rapid and astonishing succession of events in which he himself became so strangely involved.

"Doctor Garford," Miss Ames announced during the Saturday morning office hour. "He says he will take only a minute." And at Peter's nod she admitted the examiner of the Universal Life Insurance Company.

"Sorry to trouble you again, doctor," began the latter with a business-like briskness that made his hearer stare. "I just dropped in to ask you not to mention our little talk the other day. About Zarady, you remember? Our investigation was only a matter of form, and we should be sorry to have any discussion of the affair. I'm sure you understand, doctor?"

Peter studied his visitor curiously. A striking change had come over the man and he wondered what had caused it. On Monday Garford had looked the typical failure in life; today he bore himself importantly, authoritatively. Gone were the apologetic manner and harassed glance. What had happened to him?

"Do you mean you've dropped your investigation?" Peter made his tone as uninterested as possible.

"Oh, entirely!" said Garford.

"Then you have found your suspicions groundless?"

"Quite."

"I see." Peter was as puzzled now by his caller's change of attitude as by the change in his appearance and manner. "Your company made a bad gamble on Zarady?"

A frown crossed Garford's face. "That sort of thing is bound to occur now and then," he

answered.

"Of course," agreed Peter. "Has the claim

been paid?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. I—well, the fact is I'm no longer associated with the Universal Life."

"Is that so?" Peter murmured. "I hope this affair did not—"

"Oh, not at all—nothing of the kind," put in Garford. "I received a better offer and resigned."

"Then you are not here today as the company's representative?"

"Well"—the question was plainly not a welcome one—"well, yes—in a way. I'm just winding things up—loose ends here and there."

"I see," said Peter again, though he was convinced that the man was lying, as he had lied before in claiming to act for his company. His company probably knew nothing whatever about his

"investigation." He had come then as now, in his own interests.

"I am leaving New York shortly," he went on, resuming the business-like, consequential air that had for a few moments deserted him. "I expect to go to Brazil. I have accepted a proposition to associated myself with one of the enterprises of Andrassy & Co.—the bankers, you know. They are back of a world of things."

"Is that Theodore Andrassy?"

"Yes. You've heard of him, of course—interested in music and art. A wonderful man, doctor."

"So I am told. Have you met him personally?"

"Oh yes." Garford's manner was almost pompous. "He made me the offer himself."

"Indeed? That was very flattering."

"Very gratifying," amended Garford. "A great thing, doctor, to be in with a man like that—fixes you for life."

He rose, and as he did so Peter noticed that his shoes were quite new. So were his clothes, and the hat he had just picked up from the desk and was tenderly fingering—a very good hat, indeed, and a very well-cut suit. That accounted in part for the change in him, accounted for his more assertive bearing. Nothing like good clothes to make a man hold up his head in this material world. Garford must have had a windfall.

"Well, doctor," he was saying, "it has been a

great pleasure to make your acquaintance. If you

ever get down to Rio look me up."

"Thank you, Mr. Garford," said Peter. "Or is it Doctor Garford? I fancied Miss Ames announced you as Doctor—"

"She did. I am a doctor."

"I don't think you mentioned the fact when you were here before. Were you one of the Universal's examiners, may I ask?"

"Yes."

The admission was made reluctantly, and after it the speaker appeared to hesitate, wavering between discretion and desire, between self-interest

and self-pride. Then the latter won.

"I know what you're thinking, Dr. Bennett. You're thinking it was I who examined Zarady and passed him, and that I lost my job in consequence. But you're wrong. I didn't lose my job. I resigned it for a better one, as I've told you. And as for passing Zarady—well, all I care to say about that is that—you'd have passed him yourself. We'll let it go at that, eh? That's all I feel at liberty to say." He gave Peter a meaning glance.

"Do you intend me to infer that Zarady's death

was not a nat---'

"I haven't said so! I say only that you, your-self, would have passed him as a good risk, a month ago, as I did. And I'm saying more than I ought to in saying that, but—well, a doctor feels

some professional pride about a matter like that, and—I feel that you'll respect my confidence."

"I'm not in the habit of discussing such things

indiscriminately," answered Peter.

"I'm sure of that, doctor. That is why I've been so frank with you." He grasped Peter's hand. "Good-bye. Don't forget me if you ever come to Rio."

"Thanks," said Peter. "What is your address

there? Rio is a pretty big town, I'm told."

"Why—I don't know my address yet, myself," stammered Garford. "You see, Mr. Andrassy has not yet decided just where he will place me. But if you call up Andrassy and Co., or address me in Rio, in their care, you can always reach me."

There was an emphasis on the "always" that lingered in Peter's mind after his caller had gone. That Garford considered himself fixed for life, to borrow his own phrase, was evident. It was a great thing to be in with a man like Andrassy, he had said. But how had he achieved that good fortune? Why should the astute financier take such an obvious weakling into his employ? Why was he sending him to South America? To get him out of the way? It would seem so, since, as he had not decided what to do with him he could have no real need of his services.

But why did Andrassy want Garford out of the way? To stop his investigation of Zarady's death? That was the only plausible inference, for

it must have been that inquiry that had brought him into contact with the banker. Then Andrassy was in some way involved, or at least interested. He had been Zarady's friend, according to Olive. And certainly he was losing no time in showing, by the concert he was to give, his friendship and admiration for the dead man. A wonderful person Olive also thought him.

The memory of her praises brought back to Peter the recollection of Garrison's expression while she sang them. Mere jealousy did not seem

an adequate explanation of it.

Peter formed an abrupt decision. He would go to Garrison and tell him of his talks with Garford, and tell him also what Kala had said. He had made Garford no promise of secrecy, and he would welcome an opportunity to share what he knew of the man with somebody. For the more he considered the matter the deeper his conviction became that Garford's change of fortune was not an honest one. And Garrison was honest, he felt sure of that. Yes, he would go and have a frank talk with him.

CHAPTER XVI

ANOTHER PERPLEXING POINT

Peter had planned to make it. Reaching the studio in the early afternoon he found the artist at work and obviously somewhat surprised to receive a call at that hour of the day. His welcome was hearty enough, but when greetings were over there came an awkward pause.

"Happened to be passing," said Peter, "and thought I'd accept your invitation to drop in and see your things. I've always been interested in

pictures. Mind if I look about?"

A quarter of an hour passed in the discussion of art and artists, and the longer Peter deferred speaking of the real purpose of his visit the more difficult it became to broach the topic. The more he saw of Garrison, the more he heard of his earnest talk about his work, the more grotesque it seemed to doubt him.

Still, the feeling that in Garrison's place he would wish to be told anything so closely concerning himself caused him to linger on, hoping for some opening that would permit him to come to his point without appearing to do so deliberately.

At last the chance came. Garrison was showing

some examples of his work in landscape and came suddenly—unexpectedly, too, it seemed—upon a vivid, tropical-looking scene, utterly different from the canvases preceding it.

"What's that?" asked Peter, as the artist was about to withdraw the painting without comment.

"Oh—just a rough thing, from memory, a bit of the mountain country of Brazil."

"Brazil?" The word startled Peter unpleasantly. "You've been there?"

Garrison answered affirmatively and put the picture aside. "I lived there several years. My father was a mining engineer and his work took him to all sorts of places. He died in Brazil. I left there then and went to Paris to study art. He had always opposed it, said there was no money in art. Poor old chap, almost to his last hour he cherished the hope of making a fortune."

"Theodore Andrassy has interests in Brazil, hasn't he?" Peter ventured after a brief hesitation.

At the question Garrison's face hardened. "I believe so," he answered.

"Speaking of him," Peter continued, "I chanced to hear something today that puzzled me. Hardly worth mentioning, but perhaps you can throw a little light on the matter. Have you happened to hear any talk about Zarady's death being thought—suspicious?"

The start with which Garrison met this sent a

chill over Peter. He did not know what he had expected, but he was not prepared for that sudden stiffening of the artist's figure into tense alertness.

"Has there been talk?" The reply was composed enough.

"I don't know," said Peter. "But I had a visit Monday from one of the medical examiners of the Universal Life Insurance Company, in which Zarady had recently taken out a policy. This man had heard from the stage doorman at Panharmonic Hall that I had taken Miss Thrace home, and he was anxious to know if I had heard anything that indicated suspicion on any one's part that Zarady's death was not a natural one."

"Had he heard anything?"

"Apparently not. His company was making an investigation merely as a matter of form, he said."

"I see." Garrison placed another canvas on the easel for Peter's inspection. "But—we were speaking of Andrassy. You were saying you had heard something about him that puzzled you."

"Yes, I was coming to that," said Peter. "This chap—his name is Garford—turned up again today. The investigation has been dropped, he told me, and he asked me not to speak of it to any one. Then I discovered that although he claimed to represent the Universal Life Company he was no longer connected with them. He had been offered a position of some kind by Andrassy and was

going to Brazil. That struck me as rather odd." "Why?"

"Well—it was the combination of things that—seemed odd, I guess," Peter stammered, taken aback a little by his companion's frankly puzzled tone. "You see, on his first appearance Garford looked down and out, shabby as to clothes and utterly discouraged, afraid of losing his job, I thought. It was he who had passed Zarady as a good insurance risk—less than a month ago—and I inferred that he was trying to unearth some suspicious circumstances in connection with Zarady's death in order to save himself. Today when he came he was like a new man, wearing the best of clothes and bearing himself like a leading citizen with money in the bank. What's the answer? Andrassy?"

"Andrassy? I don't follow you."

"I mean that Garford's inquiries may have brought him in touch with Andrassy, and Andrassy, for some reason, stopped the investigation—bought Garford off."

Garrison stared. "Do you believe Zarady's death was not caused by heart disease?" he asked.

"I have no opinion about it."

"Is it possible for heart disease to develop in a month?"

"Garford may have been mistaken in his examination."

"Andrassy evidently didn't think so—if he bought him off."

"That doesn't follow," said Peter. "Garford may have impressed Andrassy as an irresponsible person likely to make a lot of trouble for innocent people, or, at least, to start gossip that would be unpleasant for Zarady's family and friends."

Garrison shook his head emphatically. "No, if Andrassy bought the man off, as you think he did, it was for his own advantage," he replied. "I know him."

"But surely you-"

Peter stopped, struck by the realization that a curious change had come over the situation between himself and Garrison. He had been seeking to impart to the latter, as indirectly as he could, the fact that suspicion as to the nature of Zarady's death was in the air, intending then to leave him to make of the information whatever he chose. And here he found himself anxiously trying to rid Garrison's mind of the very ideas he had himself put there.

"Surely," he began again, "you can't think that Andrassy—"

"I don't know," interrupted Garrison. "I'm going to find out. You've given me just the clew I needed." He got a coat and his hat from a closet as he spoke, then: "Will you excuse me?" he asked. "I must find this Garford at once."

"Find Garford?" exclaimed Peter. "What for?"

"I can't explain now—not yet. But I'm more grateful to you than I can say." He wrung Peter's hand. "The Universal Life, you said? They'd have his address, of course."

"I hope you'll do nothing hasty, or unwise," said Peter anxiously. "Remember, anything you do may involve Olive—drag her name in, I mean. You must think of her."

"I am thinking of her. That's why there's no time to lose. She sings at that man's house to-

night."

To this enigmatic remark Peter made no answer, and the two parted at the entrance of the building. Garrison paused only to grip Peter's hand again.

"You can't imagine what a service you've done

me," he said.

Peter could not imagine. It was something else to wonder about.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND DEATH

INE o'clock. Peter put his watch back in his pocket and tried to fix his attention on the medical journal open in his hand. Nine o'clock; Andrassy's concert must be under way by now. Perhaps at that very moment Olive was singing, or Kala playing.

And Garrison, where was he? Despite all Peter's efforts to keep his mind from the artist, he found it returning to him again and again. All afternoon he had tried in vain to shake off the feeling that something would come of his call at the studio—something unfortunate.

He read a paragraph in his journal, then realizing that he had read it before, he threw the magazine aside and got up. It was absurd to waste time like that; better to go to the theatre or to drop in somewhere for a social call. There were a dozen he really ought to make. To get a couple of them off his conscience would be something to the good, anyhow.

However, a play would be more of a distraction, he concluded, and went into his waiting-room for an evening paper to look up the theatrical news. He ran his eye down the list of attractions and back again without arriving at a choice, and he had just started down the column for the second time when he heard a rush of feet along his private hallway. He dropped the paper at once, glad of any interruption.

But the steps passed. Then he caught the sound of fingers at the lock of his street door. He smiled. The steps had been very light and quick, a girl's steps—a maid perhaps from another apartment, through with the day's work and in a hurry to meet her young man. It was too bad to block the way of true love, but he could not have his office left at the mercy of sneak thieves.

He gave a start. A panting, whimpering cry, low and distressful, had reached his ear. Automatically his feet moved toward it, he threw open the door, there came a frightened gasp from without, and the next thing he knew he had a fainting girl in his arms.

She was a little thing, a featherweight for him, not much more than a child, with short brown hair curling beneath her round fur cap. And she was not a servant. So much her soft, well-tended hands told him.

She swallowed the stimulant he poured between her lips, and in a moment opened her eyes.

"Don't be afraid. You're all right," he said, and continued to repeat the soothing phrases while

expression crept back into her eyes, a faintly wondering look at first, then an alarmed stare.

"You're all right," he said again gently. "I frightened you by opening the door so suddenly. You just fainted a little, that's all, so I brought you in here to my office. I'm Dr. Bennett. You were in the hall trying to open the door, don't you remember?"

She inhaled a long, fluttering breath, still gazing at him, dumbly, childishly. Then she sat up, trembling. He let go her hand and moved away, on the pretext of putting aside the glass he had used, but really to give her a chance to recover her bearings. Who was she, he wondered, and where could she be going alone at that hour?

At a movement from her he looked around. She was standing up.

"I want to go," she said, her voice full of alarm. "I must go."

"Of course, whenever you like," he answered. "But I think you'd better wait a few minutes, you're weak yet and you might faint on the way home."

She sat down immediately—just like a child, he thought.

"You are going home, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes."

"Isn't it pretty late for you to be out alone?"

"I'm not afraid."

"How far have you to go?"

She did not answer that, but looked toward the door.

"I'm not asking out of curiosity," Peter explained, "but because you don't look very strong, and if you have far to go you should have some one with you."

She started up. The telephone bell in his office was ringing and the sound seemed to alarm her.

"You see, you're still weak and nervous and you'd better wait a while before you try to go home," he said. "If you'll excuse me I'll answer the 'phone. I'll be right back."

On the wire there was first an excited jumble of voices. "Well? Hello?" he said impatiently, thinking it a case of crossed wires.

"Doctor Bennett?" The house operator's voice rose suddenly over the others. "You're wanted at once. Mr. Kala has just been found dead in his apartment and——"

"Dead!" gasped Peter. "Kala!"

"Yes. Won't you please go up? Doctor Simpson wants you. He has already gone up. I told him about Mr. Kala's having you a few days ago when he was sick, and he said for you to come up as soon as you could."

"What happened to Kala?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows. Doctor Simpson said to ask you to hurry, please."

"All right."

Peter hung up the receiver. He had known

something was going to happen, but not this—not this.

He stood for a moment staring at the wall, trying to adjust his mind to the sudden turn of affairs. Then he remembered the girl in the waiting-room. She must he looked after first. He had better get her a cab or induce her to wait quietly until he returned. On the whole he thought it would be better for her to wait. It would take time to get a taxi, and besides, he wanted to find out something about her. She could not be at all well, poor child, to faint like that at next to nothing.

Switching off the light in the office he went back to the reception room, but in the doorway came to an astonished halt. The room was empty, the girl had gone.

The outer hall was empty too. And since she could not have opened his door she must have gone out by the main door of the building. By hurrying he could perhaps overtake her and have a cab called for her.

But she was nowhere to be seen when he reached the main hall, and with the hope that she would get home all right he dismissed her from his mind and turned to the more serious business that awaited him.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POLICE INVESTIGATE

PENDING the arrival of the coroner, Rudolf Kala's body still lay where it had been found, on the bedroom floor between bed and chiffonier, with wide eyes staring up at the ceiling. The dead pianist was in evening dress, his thick black hair unruffled and with no mark of disorder about his person or in the room.

So much a glance told Peter, then he looked at the men standing over the body. Two were policemen called in from the street and in charge of the case until those summoned from headquarters should arrive. The other three men present were Dr. Simpson, an acrid, elderly individual with whom Peter had some slight acquaintance, Bangs, the house superintendent, and a middle-aged, mildlooking man whose face seemed familiar to Peter but whom he could not at the moment identify.

"I sent for you, doctor," said Simpson, "because having attended Mr. Kala recently I thought you would be able to throw light on the cause of his death. Was his heart bad?"

Peter bent over the body without replying. He wished to size up the situation before answering

questions—that particular question, at any rate. "Was he found stretched out like this?" he asked.

"No—huddled up," answered the other physician. "I had to move him a little in making my examination, but I thought it better to leave the body where it was found until the coroner had seen it."

"When did it happen?"

"That's what nobody knows, sir—or 'ow it 'appened." This from the superintendent, an excitable little man whose London aitches deserted him in perturbed moments.

"He hasn't been dead an hour, in my opinion," declared Simpson very positively. "Feel his skin."

skin.

Peter nodded assentingly.

"It was this person that found 'im," resumed Bangs. "If 'e 'adn't come arsking for 'im the poor young man might 'ave been 'ere alone all night."

The "person" referred to spoke up. "I am Mr. Andrassy's butler, sir—Mr. Theodore Andrassy's," he explained in a voice as mild and apathetic as his face. "Mr. Kala was engaged to play at Mr. Andrassy's concert this evening—as perhaps you know, sir."

He paused politely for a reply from Peter, whereupon Dr. Simpson took up the narrative again.

"He says that when Kala did not arrive he

tried to 'phone him, but was told by Miss Ellis that Kala did not answer and must be out. He 'phoned several times, with the same result, he says, and finally as the concert was being delayed Mr. Andrassy sent him here to find out if anything was wrong. And when Miss Ellis failed again to get a response from the apartment he asked her to send somebody up here."

"I thought, sir, that the telephone might be out

of order," explained the butler.

"Miss Ellis told him," continued Simpson, "that he could go up and satisfy himself, and she told Joseph, the elevator man, to show him where the apartment was. When they got up here and saw a light they rang several times and knocked, and then Joseph tried the door and found it unlocked. He looked in and seeing a light in the bedroom thought Kala might be asleep. So he went in. The next moment he came rushing back to the door."

"He was badly frightened, sir," observed Andrassy's butler calmly. "I had considerable difficulty in learning what had occurred. Then I came in here myself, not thinking it possible Mr. Kala could be really dead. When I found he was I telephoned down to the operator at once."

"Joseph was meantime rushing his car up for Bangs," put in Simpson, "and as I happened to walk into the building as Miss Ellis got the news she told me. I directed her to notify the police and then call you. When I got up here I found Bangs, and by the time I had looked the body over those policemen arrived. The case is obviously heart disease. There's no evidence whatever of violence. The poor fellow was already dressed for his concert. Death must have come in an instant."

"Of course my opinion is subject to correction from you, Dr. Bennett," Simpson added when Peter did not reply. "I know nothing about Kala's health except"—pausing with a significant glance—"what I infer from his—heredity."

Peter stared at his colleague. Kala's heredity?

What was Simpson driving at?

"And the fact that he was taken ill very suddenly a few days ago led me to conclude that he was subject to heart attacks and had finally succumbed to one. Am I right?"

The moment had arrived for Peter to answer. To continue to evade the issue might arouse suspicion in the mind of someone present that would prove troublesome later on.

"I never saw him but once---"

That was as far as Peter got, for chance favored him by selecting that moment to bring on the scene several officers from police headquarters.

"It's Captain Barbee," said one of the patrolmen, hurrying into the living-room to greet his superior.

The unexpected respite was very welcome to

Peter, for he was anxious for more light on the case before committing himself to an opinion. Not that he had any thought of concealing the truth; but what was the truth? He did not know what had been Kala's motive in feigning illness on Monday evening, and to repeat the extraordinary conversation that took place between them on that occasion could not fail to give wrong impressions and to start false conjectures. Seizing the opportunity given him by the pause, he turned to Simpson.

"I didn't catch your meaning just now," he said in a low tone. "What about Kala's her-

edity?"

"Don't you know the gossip?" asked Simpson. "He was believed to be Zarady's son."

"Oh-I see."

Involuntarily Peter's eyes sought the dead face on the floor. Why had he not thought of that before? It was so obviously the explanation of those remarks about Mrs. Zarady's absence from the pianist's concerts.

"Zarady died of heart disease, too. That's

what I was thinking of," added Simpson.

"I see," said Peter again.

"I guess there's no doubt about the relationship. Zarady had his life insured for him."

Here Captain Barbee's entrance into the room prevented further talk, and while the officer was being put in possession of the known facts of the case, Peter reviewed his conversation with Kala in the light of his new information.

It seemed now quite probable that Kala's worry about his heart had been genuine. His concern as to Garford's activities also took on a different aspect. If the Universal Life policy was the one of which he was the beneficiary he naturally felt himself to be the particular object of Garford's suspicions. That explained his excitement. It explained too his threat to divert suspicion to somebody else, to Olive, should Garford make trouble for him. But where did Theodore Andrassy come in? His connection with the affair was no clearer than before.

"Heart disease, eh? That your opinion too, doctor?"

Captain Barbee's methods were admirably direct. He had wasted no time on non-essentials, such as the events that had led up to the discovery of the corpse, considering it to be entirely negligible that the body had been found by a frightened elevator man at nine p. m. instead of by a frightened chambermaid at nine a. m. The body itself was what interested him.

And there it was at his feet, unmarked by violence, and with a reputable-looking doctor at hand pronouncing it a case of heart disease. Nothing surely to waste any of his valuable time and thought on. His question to Peter, in fact, was an empty courtesy. He hardly looked at him

when he addressed him, but was already turning to the superintendent to issue a few orders before taking his leave. Peter's reply therefore surprised him.

"No, I do not think Mr. Kala died of heart disease," said Peter, bringing every living eye in the room upon himself in an astonished stare.

"What do you mean?" snapped Barbee. His glance was frankly suspicious, a warning that no struggling saw-bones need try to get free advertising out of a case with him on the job.

"I was about to state my opinion to Dr. Simpson when your arrival interrupted me," answered Peter. "As he is aware I was called in to see Mr. Kala Monday evening and—"

"Were you his doctor?"

"No."

"Dr. Bennett lives in the building, sir," explained Bangs. "Mr. Kala being suddenly ill naturally called the nearest doctor."

"Umph," grunted Barbee. "What was the

matter with him? Was he very sick?"

"No," said Peter. "He told me he had a headache. Then he said it was really his heart he was worried about and he asked me to examine it. I did so and found it perfectly sound."

"Then what was he worrying about it for?"

"I don't know. People often get ideas of that kind about themselves without any reason whatever."

"Don't you think, doctor, that what I told you probably accounts for his worrying?" Simpson put in.

"Yes, if it's true," said Peter.

"What's that?" Barbee demanded, and Simpson repeated to him the gossip concerning the dead man's paternity, taking care that the others did not hear.

The police officer was plainly impressed. "Umph, died the same way, too," was his comment. "Maybe you made a mistake about his heart being all right," he suggested to Peter. "That's possible, I guess?"

"Yes-possible."

"All the evidence points that way."

"It seems to."

"Umph," Barbee frowned. "What do you think killed him?"

"I have no idea," said Peter.

The frown on Barbee's face deepened. "Has he been sick any more since that evening?"

"I don't know. He didn't send for me again."

"Has he?" This to Bangs, impatiently.

"Why-I 'ardly know as to that, sir," stammered the superintendent. "It's not likely I'd 'ave heard of it if he was, sir."

"Miss Ellis, the telephone operator, may be able to tell you," Peter suggested. "She might know if he had had a doctor again."

"I'll ask 'er at once, sir." Bangs caught up the telephone from the table beside the bed.

"Tell her to come up here; I'll ask her myself," ordered Barbee. "And get that elevator man, too."

"Yes, sir."

"Here, boys." The captain beckoned to a group of his subordinates and motioned toward the dead youth. "Put him on the bed. I want to look him over."

The looking-over took very little time. Barbee's eyes traveled downward from the well-brushed hair to the jaunty bows on the patent leather pumps; then more slowly they traveled up again, pausing while he lifted in turn the once valuable hands and carefully scrutinized them. From the pocket of the immaculate white waist-coat he drew out a handsome watch, compared its time with that shown on his own dial, and replaced it. Lastly he bent the dead man's head in various directions, bringing into view above the collar the entire circumference of the throat. It bore no sign of injury.

Turning about, the officer next surveyed the room, sending his keen glance methodically over every foot of visible space, the spectators moving aside unbidden to give him a clear field. The circuit completed, he crossed to the chiffonier and inspected at closer range the articles on it, toilet articles, nothing else. Opening a drawer or two

he glanced within them, but finding only stacks of handkerchiefs, collars, and such things, he closed them again.

Then he moved on to the bathroom. There no detail held his attention except a drinking glass on a shelf above the washbowl. This he sniffed at. At the bottom could be seen a small quantity of what looked like clear water. He dipped his finger in, touched his tongue to the finger, and set the glass back in its place.

"Was the light on in the bathroom when the body was found?" he inquired from the doorway of Bangs, who having finished telephoning was, like every one else present, following his movements in rapt silence.

"I-I think so, sir," faltered Bangs.

"You think so! Don't you know?"

"Of course, sir. It was, sir."

"If you will excuse my speaking, sir, the bathroom was dark."

This remark came from the mild-looking servant of Theodore Andrassy. The words were subdued and respectful in tone and were addressed to Barbee: but the speaker glanced toward Bangs for an instant as he added in the same quiet, formal manner: "This person turned on the light himself, sir."

"I!" gasped Bangs, too astonished to resent the tit-for-tat of the word "person."

Peter, despite all that was on his mind at the

moment, was amused by the neat reprisal. What the relative social standing of a banker's butler and an apartment-house superintendent might be he neither knew nor cared. Nor did this proof that the butler had learned his business and the English language in England interest him. He had already inferred that from the man's accent and demeanor. What did interest and surprise him was the discovery that the impassive, weary-looking creature had either the spirit or skill to hit back so deftly. Where had he seen the man before? Some place where he had been employed? His face seemed curiously familiar.

"He was greatly excited, sir. I think it very likely—if I may be permitted to pass an opinion, sir—that he was quite unaware of what he was

doing."

This verdict appeared to render poor Bangs inarticulate, with emotions too deep for utterance, and Barbee did not wait for him to recover himself.

"What were you doing here?" he demanded of the butler.

"I came up with the elevator man, sir. I was waiting at the hall door when he came in and discovered Mr. Kala, and I——"

"And 'e was 'ere all alone, 'e was, sir, while Joe was going for me. 'Ow do I know it wasn't 'im as turned on the light?''

Captain Barbee looked at the accused.

"I could not have permitted myself the liberty, sir," replied the latter in his respectful monotone.

"What were you doing while you were here alone?" questioned the officer.

"I telephoned Mr. Andrassy what had occurred, sir."

"On this 'phone?"

Yes, sir. The young lady will tell you so, sir."

"Oh! But 'e couldn't take a liberty, 'e couldn't!"

"Shut up," said Barbee to the hapless Bangs. "Is that all you did?" he asked the butler.

"Yes, sir. It took some time to get the number. And naturally Mr. Andrassy asked questions. I had just hung up the receiver when the superintendent came running in, greatly excited—as I have already remarked, sir."

"And why not—with what 'ad 'appened?" cried Bangs.

The captain quelled him with a look. "What's the matter with that operator, Miss — what did you say her name was?" he demanded.

"Miss Ellis, sir." Bangs jumped to the telephone.

"Tell her to hurry up. I haven't got all night to spend here."

"Yes, sir."

"What's your name?" This to the butler.

"Franz Hofer, sir."

"Been working for Andrassy long?"

"About a year, sir."

"Umph," growled Barbee thoughtfully, while Peter gave the butler another close scrutiny. Odd that the man's face should seem so familiar to him, as if he had seen it somewhere recently. Yet where could he have seen Theodore Andrassy's butler? Hofer? No, the name conveyed nothing.

"What do you think of this case?" asked

Barbee.

"I, sir." Hofer's quiet voice was faintly tinged with astonishment—at having his opinion asked, apparently.

"Yes. You knew him, didn't you?"

"I, sir? Oh no, sir." The mild eyes widened a little on his questioner, then shifted to the figure on the bed. "I never saw him until this evening, sir."

"Wasn't he a friend of Mr. Andrassy's? Didn't you say he was going there tonight?"

"Merely as an artist, sir—to play for Mr. Andrassy's guests."

"Then Andrassy didn't know him either?"

"I couldn't say as to that, sir. He was not a visitor at the house."

"Umph." Captain Barbee withdrew his attention from Hofer. "Say, where's that girl?" he snapped. "And that elevator man? What's the matter with this house, anyhow?"

"There's been a little delay, sir," apologized

Bangs abjectly. "They'll be 'ere in a moment, sir."

Barbee turned away with an impatient frown. The next instant his glance was arrested by an object in the hand of one of his subordinates, whose big form just then appeared in the doorway to the living-room.

"What's that you've got there, Quinn?" he asked curiously.

The policeman held out his hand and everyone stared at the thing it held, a woman's gray fur boa, ornamented with several small animal heads and tails.

"I'm just after takin' a look round in the other room, and I picks this here up under the sofy," said Quinn.

"Under the sofa?" Barbee took the fur.

"Under it was, sor. Must have got kicked there, somehow," replied Quinn. Then turning at sounds behind him: "Here's the young lady, sir," he added and removed himself from the doorway.

The telephone operator entered briskly and with confidence, the colored elevator man following in her wake. He was visibly trembling at the enforced return to the scene of his recent shock, but Miss Ellis had the look of one impervious to fear, except perhaps the fear of not doing her full duty in the world.

"I am very sorry to have kept you waiting,"

she announced to Barbee after sweeping the room with a brisk glance. "I had to wait for Mrs. Bangs to take the switchboard. I couldn't leave it unattended, of course."

The captain nodded in acceptance of the excuse. He was standing with his hands behind him, the fur neckpiece concealed from Miss Ellis' view, and he devoted an instant of silence to looking her over. She was not at all pretty, but she was youngish and plainly without any nonsense about her, a person who could be relied upon for concise and accurate information. Barbee, however, regarded her coldly. She was of the feminine type that he approved of theoretically and hated at sight.

At his request she repeated briefly the story of Hofer's telephoning, his arrival in person, and her order to Joseph, the elevator man, to take him to Kala's rooms.

Here Joseph was questioned. With little result, however. He had seen the dead man on the bed and seemed unable to muster two connected thoughts. It was clear that he had nothing of value to impart, so Barbee told him he could go, which he did without delay.

"Now, Miss Ellis, I understand that Kala had been sick during the week and had a doctor—Dr. Bennett here. Had he been sick since then?"

"No. At any rate, he didn't 'phone for a doctor while I was on duty. He appeared to be all

right again the day after Dr. Bennett saw him. He has been out every day since."

"Went out a lot, did he?"

"He went out every day to some music studio to practice. He was not allowed to practice here because the other tenants complained."

"And quite right, too, sir," declared the superintendent. "The noise he could make, sir, you

wouldn't believe."

"Did he have many visitors?" Barbee asked Miss Ellis, ignoring Bangs.

"No, very few."

"Any women?"

"Oh no-never!"

"Not in this 'ouse, sir."

"How long has he been living here?"

"Only a few weeks," said Miss Ellis. "He was a sub-tenant of Mrs. Craig, the regular tenant, who has gone south for the winter."

"Humph, a woman's rooms, eh? All this stuff here hers?"

"The furnishings? Yes."

"Did she leave any of her clothes behind?"

"('lothes?'' Miss Ellis looked surprised. "I don't think she would have done that," she answered.

"How long did you say she's been gone?"

"I said a few weeks. The exact time is three weeks and four days. She left on a Tuesday."

"You seem to have a good memory."

"I have to have to give good service."

"Umph. Then maybe you can remember if you ever saw the lady wearing this?"

Miss Ellis expended but one glance on the fur boa, then her upper lip took on a curve of disdain.

"Oh no, Mrs. Craig never wore squirrel," she said.

"This was found in the other room under the sofa," said Barbee. "How would you say it got there?"

"Under the sofa?" Miss Ellis regarded the despised neckpiece with somewhat keener interest.

"Does any woman have occasion to come in

here, to clean or for laundry?"

"A maid comes in every morning, but I don't think that can be hers. It's rather good squirrel."

"Umph, is it?" said Barbee. The unknown owner of the fur, it appeared, was some one of more exalted station than a char-woman but less illustrious than a lady who went south for the winter.

"The cleaners leave their things in the basement," put in Bangs, but nobody listened.

"You say somebody comes in to clean up every day? Then she was here today? Do you think she could have overlooked a thing the size of this lying under a sofa?"

"I don't see how she could," said Miss Ellis.

"Then some woman's been here since she left. Who was it?"

"Nobody could come up without Miss Ellis knowing it, sir," protested Bangs. "It's a rule of the 'ouse to announce all visitors by telephone."

"A rule not always followed, I guess."

"But Miss Ellis would 'ave seen the woman. The switchboard is just opposite the elevator."

Barbee turned to the operator. "Well?"

She looked up at once from the fur in his hand, at which she had been intently staring, and her eyes had an oddly absent expression.

"I took the switchboard at noon," she said, "and as far as I know nobody has been here to see Mr. Kala except one person, and that was a young man, a Mr. Garrison."

At the name Peter felt a shiver pass down his spine. Garrison? What could he have been doing there?

"What did he want?" asked Barbee.

"I don't know. He was here about four o'clock, but did not stay long. At half-past five Mr. Kala went out to dinner and returned in about an hour. He always had dinner early when he was going to play in the evening. About eight o'clock he 'phoned down to ask about a package of laundry he was expecting——''

"At eight, you say?" exclaimed the officer.
"As late as that?"

"Yes. I remember looking at the clock and telling him I didn't think there was much chance of the package coming after that."

"Then he was alive at eight o'clock."

"I said he hadn't been dead any time," com-

mented Simpson.

"And you're sure, are you," Barbee went on to the girl, "that nobody came up here after that?"

"Perfectly sure, but—" Miss Ellis broke off, her glance dropping again to the piece of fur.

"But what?" prompted Barbee, watching her.

"Why—I hardly think that——" She paused again.

"Speak out."

"Well—it can't have any bearing on the case, of course," she said, "but a girl came here one evening to see Mr. Kala and she had on a squirrel cap—a round cap like a boy's."

Peter gave a start, then cursed himself roundly for it. But the thing was so unexpected, so astonishing, that his nerves were powerless against the shock of it. All he could see for the moment was a girl's frightened face under a gray fur cap.

He glanced about him hastily, and found alleyes on Miss Ellis except two. Those two belonged to Theodore Andrassy's butler. The man was standing somewhat back of the others, as was natural for a servant, and he was staring at Peter. Staring is the word, for so intent was his gaze that for a second or two he appeared unaware that it was being returned. Then he looked away, his face impassive once more.

Had he been watching, Peter wondered? Or had that start of his attracted his attention? The latter probably. Good servants were always observant.

Thus Peter reassured himself while listening to what Miss Ellis was saying.

"It was last Sunday that she was here. I know, because when I told her Mr. Kala was at Panharmonic Hall playing she said no, he wasn't, that the conductor had dropped dead and the concert was stopped, and that Mr. Kala ought to have got home by that time. And when I said he had not she said she would wait for him."

"Umph. She don't seem to have made a hit with you," observed Barbee drily as the telephone girl's eloquent upper lip again registered disdain.

"I don't think much of a girl that runs after a man."

"How do you know she didn't want to see him on business?"

"She was too pretty," said Miss Ellis. "Besides, it was after nine o'clock," she added, flushing when the men about her smiled.

"So she was pretty, was she?" queried Barbee.

"They always are, that kind," returned the operator tartly.

"Umph. So she was 'that kind,' eh? How do

you know?"

"I judge from appearances."

"What appearances?"

Miss Ellis frowned. "Really," she replied, "I don't know what sort of a girl she was. I scarcely looked at her, in fact."

"You seem to have noticed that she was

pretty."

"I could see that at a glance."

"Umph. She must have been very pretty. What else did you see, at a glance?"

"Nothing," snapped the girl.

"You saw her fur cap, didn't you?"

"Yes, I couldn't help noticing it, it was so odd. It made her look like a child."

"So she looked like a child? How old a child?"

"She wasn't a child at all; she was a grown girl."

"Twenty? twenty-five?"

"She wasn't over twenty."

"How about under?"

"She may have been under, a year or two."

"Umph. And looked like a child. She was small, then? Dark or fair?"

"I didn't notice. I didn't notice anything else about her."

"Then you couldn't say whether she had this fur thing on?"

"She might have. I didn't notice it."

"When you told her Kala wasn't here did she wait, as she said she would?"

"No. I supposed she was waiting in the entrance hall where there are seats, but when I

went to the door a few minutes later to give an order to the porter there the hall was empty."

"What did Kala say when you told him about her?"

"I didn't tell him. I didn't want to embarrass him."

"Umph." Barbee looked down at the dead pianist with fresh interest. "Do you think it would have embarrassed him?" he queried sceptically.

"I don't know." Miss Ellis vented her annoyance in an audible sigh. "But I knew if she wanted him for anything important she'd come again."

"And did she?"

"No."

"Would you know her if you saw her again?"

"Yes."

"Sure she wasn't here this evening?"

"Perfectly."

"Sure there wasn't any other woman here?" Another sigh. "Perfectly."

"Perfectly sure, eh? Then"-holding up the boa so that the heads on it nodded at the girl-"do you think these squirrels came in through the window, looking for nuts?"

Miss Ellis did not deign to smile, though several of Barbee's subordinates guffawed appreciatively. She did not even deign to reply.

"Umph." The captain's characteristic grunt

sounded like an abysmal chuckle. "You can go." And Miss Ellis departed, curling her upper lip.

"Well, doctor, what's your opinion as to that?" Barbee went on to Peter. "Exhibit A, here, is the only evidence brought to light so far to support your notion that this young fellow didn't just keel over naturally from a weak heart. Still stick to your idea?"

Poor Peter. He would have given anything not to stick. "I can't alter my professional opinion, you know, Captain, merely because you can't find any evidence to support it," he answered lightly. "But don't misunderstand me. say is this, that when I examined Mr. Kala less than a week ago I found his heart in good shape. Consequently I can't believe that his death was caused by heart disease."

"What was it caused by then? He wasn't shot, stabbed, strangled, smothered, drowned, or blackjacked. Was he poisoned, do you think?"

"That's easily settled," said Simpson before

Peter could answer.

"Quite so," said Barbee. "So we'll adjourn this seance. The next move is up to the coroner."

CHAPTER XIX

ENTER THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

PETER passed a restless night. After thinking for several hours, setting up theories like ten-pins only to knock them down again with facts, he resolutely banished thought and went to sleep. But he slept badly, dreaming and waking, sleeping and dreaming again. And always in his dreams a gray fur cap and a gray boa and a girl's face appeared, grotesquely combined with incongruous things.

It was not that his conscience troubled him for concealing the fact of the girl's presence in the house that evening. He felt no qualms whatever about that. His deepest instincts justified his silence. He could not have spoken. She was so young and so little—and so frightened.

Why was she frightened? He forced himself to face that question. She had been to Kala's rooms and had come down by the stairs, just before the discovery of the body. That was nine o'clock. At eight Kala had been alive. What had happened in the intervening hour?

She must have gone up by the stairs also, long as the climb was. For it was possible, easy in

fact, for a person to take the turning from the main corridor to his private hallway unseen by the telephone operator, and then steal up the stairs. No one used them, with two elevators in the building.

And that, perhaps, was what had become of her on the previous Sunday evening, when she had disappeared from the foyer after saying she would wait for Kala's return. For that was the night he had found his street door unlocked. She had gone out that way. And she could have gone that way again but for the catch on his lock. If only he had never heard of the infernal thing! Then he would not have seen the girl, would have known nothing about her, would not now be haunted by the memory of her childish, frightened face.

How had her neckpiece got under the sofa? That was another puzzle. Kicked there? Perhaps. Possibly the elevator man, in his terrified dash from the room, had struck his foot against it. Still, a piece of fur was not a thing to go spinning ten feet at one kick.

Hofer? He tried the name again, but as before it started no echo in his memory. The man's heavy, smooth-shaven, mild-eyed countenance, where had he seen it before? Peter would have given a good deal for an answer to that question, but none came and he turned his anxious thoughts to Garrison. As the last person known to have seen and talked with Kala, Garrison would, of

course, be questioned. What would he have to tell?

This, at least, was answered by the morning papers, scant as were their accounts of the pianist's death. They had obviously been gagged, pending further inquiry. No mention was made of the fur boa and its mysterious presence under Kala's sofa, nor indeed of any suspicious circumstance. Dr. Simpson, it was stated, had examined the body and pronounced death due to heart disease. The attack had evidently been very sudden, since Anthony Garrison, an artist, who had called on Kala during the afternoon—with reference to painting the latter's portrait—was quoted as saying that the musician appeared when he saw him to be in excellent health.

Peter frowned over this reported statement of Garrison's, wondering what the real purpose of his call had been. Garrison must have gone to Kala from Garford. Why?

Andrassy had, it appeared, not permitted Kala's untimely end to interrupt his concert. Olive had sung, filling Kala's numbers on the program as well as her own. There was a flattering reference to her on another page of the paper. Indubitably she had arrived.

Yet she, too, was somehow caught in this maelstrom of mystery and death. How was it all to end?

The corpse had already been taken away, by

the coroner's order, so Peter presently learned from Bangs, who came ostensibly to impart the information, but really with the hope that after a good night's sleep Dr. Bennett might be induced to alter his view as to the condition in which he had found Kala's heart. Heart disease, in the superintendent's opinion, was a perfectly respectable phenomenon for a high-class apartment house. A lady's boa under a gentleman's sofa was not.

Dr. Simpson seemed likewise to entertain the idea that morning—or the morning papers—might have brought counsel to his colleague; for when by chance, an hour or so later, Peter encountered him getting into his car the older physician remarked with a satisfied smile that the newspapers didn't seem inclined to make any fuss about the case.

"Yes, I noticed that," Peter meekly answered. He might have added that there was nothing he so ardently desired as that the papers should not make a fuss. But this might have started Simpson to wondering.

It was noon on Sunday before anything of real importance occurred; then a telephone call came from the district attorney requesting that Dr. Bennett should drop in at the Fleming home that afternoon for a little talk. Peter went, arriving about four o'clock.

He had never met nor seen District Attorney

Fleming, but he had liked what he had heard of him and believed him to be a man of independent and careful judgment. And this favorable preconception John Fleming more than justified from the very beginning of their interview.

"I wanted to see you today, Doctor Bennett," he said when they were comfortably seated. "because I am anxious to get all the available data about the Kala case in hand, so as to decide as quickly as possible whether it is one for my office, or not. You think it is, I am told."

"Not at all," protested Peter. "I know nothing whatever as to the cause of Mr. Kala's death and have no opinion about it, except the negative one that it was not due to heart disease. And I frankly admit that if I had not myself examined his heart so short a time ago and found it sound I should share Dr. Simpson's view."

"T see."

A pause followed, during which the district attorney looked attentively at his visitor and the visitor looked expectantly at him. There was a broad-browed calmness of aspect about Fleming's newspaper photographs that Peter now felt obscured one of the man's salient characteristics, a keen glance that missed nothing. And, heavybodied as he was, he was quick of movement. His decisions would be careful, thought Peter, but they would also be swift.

"Dr. Simpson's view is the result solely of

elimination," the district attorney continued, ending the brief silence. "Heart disease because it could be nothing else."

"Captain Barbee suggested an alternative," said Peter.

"Poison, yes. But a chemical examination of the stomach was made this morning and no trace of poison was found. So that disposes of the alternative—the only alternative, since you have none to offer."

"No, I have none," replied Peter. "And of course I do not expect my opinion to outweigh Dr. Simpson's—considering the lack of evidence to support me."

"Do you mean that you may have been mistaken as to Kala's condition?"

"No. I mean that while he did not have heart disease he may have had some other malady that I failed to discover. I made no examination except of his heart."

"Some other malady that could have caused sudden death? What, for instance?"

"I know of none; but there are many things we doctors do not know."

Another pause, while Fleming regarded Peter fixedly, though now his gaze was too thoughtful to seem searching. He might merely be weighing carefully the last remark, or following up some idea suggested by it. Still, Peter felt that the calm eyes were again measuring and appraising

him of not what he had said. And this impression was borne out by Fleming's saying abruptly:

"Dr. Bennett, I'm going to take you into my confidence."

His heavy figure relaxed a little as he spoke, but Peter stirred in his chair uneasily. He did not want to be taken into the district attorney's confidence, since frankness usually demanded frankness.

"If it were a question of Kala's death only I think I should agree with Dr. Simpson that you are mistaken," Fleming went on. "But there's Zarady's death, apparently exactly like it and separated from it by less than a week. Now Kala was Zarady's son, and—"

"Is that an established fact?" Peter interrupted to ask.

"Practically. Zarady never acknowledged him publicly because of his wife, though her own attitude toward Kala seems to have done more than anything else to convince people of the truth of the story. She never admitted him to her home and never attended his concerts, I'm told. Her feeling was natural enough. She is said to have been deeply in love with her husband and to have suffered a great deal from his infidelities. She is a rich woman—that was her hold on him. Her money permitted him to live in far better style than was possible on his earnings alone."

"Is it true that Zarady's life was insured for Kala?"

"Yes. I got in touch with the Universal Life officials this morning, and learned that the policy was issued less than a month ago, that less than a month before he dropped dead, presumably of heart disease, he had been accepted as a good insurance risk."

Peter received this in silence, as if it were news to him, for he had not yet decided what line to take.

"Now that in itself means nothing. Insurance examiners are not infallible." Fleming consulted a notebook. "This one's name is Garford. I shall look him up. If he impresses me as an able and responsible man and sticks to his guns as you do, doctor, I shall be nearly convinced that neither Zarady nor Kala died of heart disease, but of something else. And what that something else was must be discovered. If it was some obscure malady it is beyond my province, but not beyond yours."

"Beyond my power, however, I'm afraid," said Peter.

"Very well, since that hypothesis gets us nowhere let us discard it. What remains? If crime, what crime? Not poison. What then? The bodies tell us nothing. They show no trace of poison or of violence of any kind. Also, death seems to have come in an instant, without any

previous symptom of illness. Do you wonder that the dozen or more doctors who witnessed Zarady's death were one in their opinion that he died of heart disease? And if a dozen doctors had been called in last night would they have sided with Dr. Simpson or with you?"

"With Simpson, of course." Peter smiled.

"You're a good sport, doctor," said Fleming. "Captain Barbee had a notion you were trying to make professional capital out of your connection with the case, but I saw at once you were not that sort, that you were sincere and that all I had to do was to show you how untenable your position is."

"And you have shown me," said Peter, rising to go, very much relieved to get off so easily.

"I'm glad of that." Fleming stood up and held out his hand. "I'm very glad. I should have disliked dragging that girl into the affair. You've heard, I suppose, that she was in Kala's rooms when he died? We're sure of that."

"Why-no," faltered Peter. "I hadn't heard." "Yes. We don't know just when she went up,

but we know she left after his death, because the door porter saw her leave the house. He said she began to run as soon as she reached the sidewalk, which was why he noticed her. She was wearing a fur cap, so she must have been the same girl who was there before. She probably crept down the stairs in terror, poor thing. A girl of good reputation, perhaps. I'm glad we shall not have to track her down. It wouldn't be difficult. A squirrel cap is not a common kind of headgear among women. That's why I kept all mention of her out of the papers. She didn't kill Kala, that's certain, so why drag her in and ruin her good name?"

Peter walked home. He wanted to think. His feeling of relief had given place again to anxiety, to the conviction that this was only a reprieve, that the end was not yet.

CHAPTER XX

A STRANGE STORY

HEN he reached his home block Peter to his surprise found Anthony Garrison pacing the sidewalk, waiting for him. The artist was hollow-eyed and haggard and hurried toward Peter with the manner of one driven by anxiety.

"May I come in for a minute, Doctor Bennett?" he said at once without stopping for greetings. "I'm going away. I'd like to—to see you."

"Of course—delighted," answered Peter. "Going away, you say?"

"Yes, tomorrow. To Brazil."

"Brazil!"

"Yes."

"But—isn't this rather unexpected?"

"Yes."

The strained tone in which the monosyllable was repeated silenced Peter, and nothing more was said until they were indoors.

"Come back to my office, if you don't mind."
Peter led the way through his reception room.
"And excuse me while I find out if there have been any calls. I don't keep any one here on Sunday and have to depend on the house operator for my

messages." He switched on the lights in the office, into which the dusk was creeping, and lowered the window shades. "Sit down. Take off your overcoat," he added, shedding his own.

He turned to the telephone. The matter of calls was not urgent, but he desired to give his visitor time to get a grip on himself, for it was plain that he was greatly upset about something. However, when he presently turned from the telephone he found Garrison standing as he had left him, perturbed and impatient.

"I have only a minute," he began at once. "I came to ask you to give a message to Olive for

me."

"A message? Surely you're not leaving without seeing her?" exclaimed Peter.

"No, no, but this is something I can't tell her. It's something I don't want her to know unless—I don't come back."

"Don't come back?"

"There isn't one chance in a thousand that I shall."

"Why not?" asked Peter. Then he grasped the other's arm. "You're unstrung, old man," he said gently. "Sit down a minute. Of course I'll give Olive your message. I'll do anything in the world I can. But what's the matter? What's happened? Why are you going to Brazil?"

Garrison sat down under Peter's kindly pressure, but there was a pause before he answered.

"I'm going," he said then, "because if I don't go I shall be accused of poisoning Zarady."

Peter recoiled, staring.

"Oh, I'm not running away!" cried Garrison. "I'm not guilty and I'm not afraid of Andrassy for myself. It's for Olive. He'll drag her in. But I'd better explain. You have no idea what I'm talking about, of course."

"I'll be glad to have you explain," answered Peter, dropping into a chair. He did not think it necessary to add that he had a better notion of what he was to hear than his visitor suspected.

"I can give you the situation in a few words," said Garrison. "Three months ago Theodore Andrassy made me an offer to go to Brazil to do some special work for him there. I refused. Then a week ago, last Saturday, I agreed to go. I did it to get money for Olive, for the mortgage on her home. Then Sunday night when I returned from Washington, where I had gone for my passport, Olive told me that you were to lend her the money, so I notified Andrassy that I had changed my mind. He took the matter calmly enough apparently. But this afternoon he came to my studio and told me that if I did not sail for Brazil tomorrow morning to carry out our agreement he would have me indicted for Zarady's murder, alleging as my motive—jealousy."

Garrison's grip on the arms of his chair tightened until the bones in his hands showed

white through the stretched skin. "I've got to go, you can see that," he went on. "I can't risk dragging Olive's name through the mud. And I can't tell her why I'm going. But I'd like her to know—some day. I'd like her to know it was for her."

"What does she think now?"

The artist made a despairing gesture. "She believes what I've told her—that I'm tired of the struggle and grind of art, that I've a chance to make money, that I'll be back in a year. And I shall never come back, I'm sure of it."

Peter studied the grim face. "Why not?" he asked at last. "Is the work you are to do so dangerous?"

"No. It is Andrassy who is dangerous. He is a spider sitting at the center of a web. Anything, everything that gets enmeshed with him is done for. My father was only one of many. I shall never be able to prove it, but I believe Andrassy to have been deliberately responsible for my father's death. He and Perez."

"Perez? Who is he?" asked Peter.

"A Brazilian, an agent of Andrassy's. It's my belief that the two are mixed up in all kinds of shady schemes. Here Andrassy's standing is good, I know, and what I say against him may strike you as absurd. But down in Rio there are men like me who know what he is, though it has been impossible so far for us to prove anything.

My father was a mining engineer, and on one of his prospecting trips through the mountains of western Brazil he came on what he believed to be 'blue ground'—diamond-bearing clay. He wasn't able, however, to investigate thoroughly because the place was an Indian burial ground and the tribe refused to allow him to excavate.

"He returned to Rio and got in touch with Andrassy, who happened to be there at the time, and who was known to be ready to back any gamble that looked good to him. Andrassy and my father came to terms and an expedition headed by my father and Perez started out. Of course the greatest secrecy was necessary, because a mere rumor of a diamond find would have sent a mob stampeding after us. I was with the party and my father and I alone knew just where we were going. He had kept the location of the place from Andrassy, not trusting him, and after a few days' association with Perez he turned over to me the record of his former trip. He feared treachery and warned me.

"We had hardly got into the mountains, the unexplored country, when he was killed, shot by one of Perez's men—by accident, it was claimed. Immediately they searched his body for his records, and I sensing my danger managed to make my escape. No need to go into details. I reached the Indians finally, almost dead from starvation. To have attempted the long trip back to Rio without

supplies would have been madness, so I went ahead, guided by my father's record of the previous journey."

Garrison paused now and looked intently at his

auditor as if uncertain how to proceed.

"Dr. Bennett, I don't know how you will judge me, whether as a silly sentimentalist or otherwise," he resumed. "After a few weeks with those Indians, fed and cared for by them, far from the sham and meanness of civilized men, I began to see things differently. I came to realize that to excavate that burial ground would be impossible without killing or driving from their homes the entire tribe. To them the place was sacred, and they would have fought to their last man and last woman to protect it from profanation. And what would be gained by the slaughter, I asked myself. A few more jewels to hang about the necks of rich women, a little more money for a few wealthy promoters. I, for one, would have no hand in it. I made my way west to the coast of Chile, and from there to Paris.

"Andrassy gave me up as dead. His expedition returned home, a failure. Since then he has sent others to try to find that precious plot of ground, but without success. My father had given them no clew as to its whereabouts. It was not till I came to New York that Andrassy learned I was still alive. Since then he has been on my track. He is wary. He tried fair means first. When I re-

fused all his offers to lead an expedition into the mountains he began to scheme to force me. Now he has succeeded. I am going to Brazil to do his bidding. After all, the extermination of those Indians must come some day with the march of progress. That is what I tell myself, but I shall not survive those who were my friends. I do not wish to. And I should not if I did. Andrassy will see to that. He will serve me as he served my father. Now do you understand my position?"

Peter nodded silently.

"I cannot tell Olive all this, of course. That is why I have come to you, to ask you to promise me that some day, when it is all over with me, you will tell her the truth."

Peter got up and crossed the room. He pushed a chair standing out from the wall back into its place. The chair was in nobody's way, but he needed the relief of physical action. He was in a mental state that he particularly disliked: his sympathies were fighting his common sense. He was moved, thrilled, by the heroism of Garrison's sacrifice for Olive. There could be no question of the poor chap's sincerity and courage, his conviction that he was taking the one course open to a true man and lover. But when Peter pictured himself reporting the scene to Olive after Garrison's death, its aspect changed, and he saw it through her eyes. He could imagine her face as she listened, her fearless gaze upon him, first

in amazement, then in indignation, then in everlasting reproach.

He came back to his chair. There were questions he must ask at any rate before he could promise anything.

"Let's talk about this a little, old man," he said, falling unconsciously into a soothing, professional tone. "You say Andrassy threatens to have you indicted for Zarady's murder. How can he do that?"

"I don't think he can, really," said Garrison.
"But he can make the charge, and drag in Olive's name, coupled with that of Zarady. It will be in all the papers, all over the country. It will never be forgotten. Zarady was married and his reputation was such—"

"I understand all that," Peter interrupted.
"But on what grounds can Andrassy base such a charge against you? You say you are innocent and I believe it; but Andrassy must have some plausible grounds, some evidence—"

"Yes, the evidence he has made for the purpose!" cried Garrison. "You don't believe that, perhaps? You don't know him. He would stop at nothing. When his first scheme failed he started another—"

"Wait a minute," said Peter. "I don't follow you. Suppose you begin at the beginning and tell me exactly what happened between you."

"Very well," said Garrison. "I will tell you

everything. I have nothing to hide. When I agreed to Andrassy's terms a week ago I did it because I was afraid Olive would go to Zarady for the money she needed if I failed her. Unfortunately I didn't tell her positively that I would get the money, and as I went straight from Andrassy's house to Washington there was no time to send her any word. Besides, I didn't think it necessary. But she, you see, had already been to Zarady-not dreaming then that I could help her—and when he told her that afternoon that she was to sing the following night she was desperate. She did not dare refuse, and she could not get in touch with me. Finally, on Sunday, she gave up hope of me, thinking I must have gone away in despair at having failed to get the money for her.

"That evening on reaching her dressing-room she found a bottle of wine on a tray. It was uncorked and she thought Zarady had sent it, because it was Hungarian wine. But when he brought Kala in to introduce him he noticed the wine and his remarks showed that he had not sent it. It was very poor stuff, he said, but he would drink a toast to her success. He drank two glasses. Then the concert began, and—but you know how it ended. When Olive returned to her dressing-room she found her maid on the floor asleep—as she thought. She tried to wake her and couldn't, and then she noticed a stain on her

apron and guessed that she had had some of the wine. But—you know all this. You were there."

"I was there, yes," Peter assented. "But Olive did not tell me anything about the wine."

"She was afraid to. The horrible thought had come to her that I had sent the wine, knowing she would not touch it and that Zarady would, so, in her fright, she threw the bottle out of the window to get rid of it before calling in a doctor. Meantime I had returned from Washington. I telephoned to her boarding-house and was told she had moved to a hotel and was to sing that evening at the Panharmonic concert. You can imagine my feelings, can't you? I walked the streets for hours, trying to calm myself. I told myself over and over that I would never see her again, never think of her. But when the concert hour came my feet dragged me to Panharmonic Hall."

"You were there then at the concert?"

"Yes, and if thoughts could kill I should be Zarady's murderer. But my thoughts did not kill him. Andrassy killed him. He had that wine put in Olive's dressing-room."

"Have you proof of that?"

"None that a jury would accept, perhaps, but—"

"Just a minute," Peter begged. "Let me get all the facts you're sure of first. What happened

next—after the concert? When did you see Olive?"

"That evening at her hotel. You had brought her home and had just gone, she told me."

"I remember," said Peter. "A card was handed her as I was leaving. Well?"

"We had a long talk. She told me all that had happened since I had seen her, all I have just told you, and she told me too that she was to get the money she needed from you. You didn't dream, of course, all your kindness meant. If you had not come to her assistance I should have got the money from Andrassy and should have gone to Brazil."

"I was glad to be of service," said Peter simply. "But please go on."

Garrison sighed, as if suddenly realizing that the escape from Andrassy had been merely temporary. "How happy Olive was when she found I had had nothing to do with the wine," he said. "How lucky she thought herself, too. For myself, I was worried, knowing Andrassy. I didn't suspect him at first. I didn't know what to think. I went back to Panharmonic Hall and into the court where she had thrown the bottle, thinking the label might give me a clew."

"Did it?" Peter leaned forward; the narrative had reached an interesting point. Later, he thought, he would tell Garrison that he too had been in the court that night.

"I hardly know." The artist frowned. "That's one of the things I don't understand. I found a piece of the bottle with a little of the wine frozen in it and took it away with me, and next morning a friend of mine, a chemist tested it in his laboratory. He tested it for various poisons, but found none of them. But there was something in it, because a drop that he gave to one of the guinea pigs that he keeps for his experiments put the animal to sleep—just as it did that maid—and the same quantity of wine from the bottle I'd bought had no effect at all."

"The bottle you'd bought?"

"Yes, I stopped at the dealer's whose address was on the label and got a bottle of the wine to compare it with the other. There was a difference between them. Of that there can be no doubt. Something was put into the wine Zarady drank, but what it was I don't know. It killed him, but only put the woman to sleep. How do you account for that, doctor?"

"I can't account for it," said Peter. It was in his mind to speak of his own visit to the wine dealer and to tell what the latter had said about the poor quality of the wine, but as he hesitated Garrison went on.

"It was bought by a woman—a young girl," he said. "The man in the store couldn't describe her. "He seemed to remember only that she was very young and had come late Saturday eve-

ning, just before closing time. It's a queer thing about that wine, Dr. Bennett. It seems to be a very poor brand, yet the girl insisted on having that and no other. Doesn't that strike you as very strange?"

Peter nodded. All thought of mentioning his own talk with the wine dealer had left him. A young girl? To him the dealer had used the term, 'young lady,' and he had associated it in a vague dread with Olive. But if Olive was not the purchaser of the wine, who was?

"She said she had been told to get that kind," added Garrison. "Told by Andrassy, of course. He knows about the wine, and about the maid drinking it. She told him herself, he said. The charge he threatens to make is that Olive borrowed money from Zarady and that I knowing what payment Zarady would demand of her, plotted with her to kill him. The charge is false and he could never prove it, but there is enough truth mixed with it to ruin Olive. And Andrassy will stop at nothing. Ever since he engaged Olive to sing at his concert I have been in torment. I felt sure it was the beginning of another scheme to coerce me through her. I say 'another scheme,' because I am convinced now that he was at the bottom of her trouble about the mortgage. When you told me yesterday about that man Garford I was sure Andrassy was up to something. I was afraid to have Olive even enter his house. I didn't know what might happen to her. I had horrible fears."

"Did you see Garford?" Peter asked.

"Yes. He's in Andrassy's pay, I'm sure. I got nothing out of him except that Zarady's insurance policy was payable to Kala. That sent me to Kala—though I couldn't tell the reporters so, of course. But I got nothing out of Kala. Andrassy had him gagged, too—with that concert engagement."

"I see," said Peter. "But, speaking of Kala,

what do you make of his death?"

"Make of it?" Garrison looked blank. "Didn't he die of heart disease?"

The reply took Peter aback, then he remembered that Garrison probably knew nothing but

what he had read in the papers.

"The papers said so," the artist declared indifferently, plainly considering the subject of no importance to himself. "But I must go." He rose. "You'll do what I ask you, won't you? You'll tell Olive the truth for me—some day?"

Peter shook his head and got up. "You're going to tell her yourself," he answered. "Now wait a minute"—as Garrison tried to protest—"what you wish to do is brave and self-sacrificing, but it isn't fair to Olive. She has a right to a voice in the matter. Now wait, let me finish. Telling her won't commit you to any course, no matter what she might say."

"She will refuse to let me go."

"Yes, but that need not prevent your going. If you want to sacrifice yourself without her consent, all right; but don't do it without her knowledge. No man has a right to place a woman under such an obligation to him. And no man has a right to ask of another man what you ask of me. Olive would never forgive me."

"Then don't tell her," said Garrison. "I should rather she never knew than have her know now. Surely you understand my feeling. This situation has come about through me—"

"Not through your fault."

"No, but I can't let Olive's loving me bring her unhappiness and disgrace."

"You can't help the unhappiness now. As for

the disgrace, put that up to her."

"I can't," Garrison stood erect, his eyes grim.
"I withdraw my request to you. I sail tomorrow, and you will oblige me by forgetting what I have told you."

"Is that final?" Peter asked. "You are determined to go without telling her the truth?"

"Yes."

"All right,"—reaching for his overcoat.
"Then I shall tell her."

"Doctor Bennett!"

"Now look here." Peter planted himself squarely before his companion. "What we need is a little common sense. I can't forget what

you've told me, and I'm not going to pretend to forget. Olive should know the facts, not after it is too late to do anything about them, but now. If, when she has heard them and spoken her mind, you still insist on sailing tomorrow I'll see you off myself and wish you luck." He gave Garrison's arm a hearty grasp. "Well? Will you tell her, or shall I?"

The surrender was plainly unwilling. "I'll tell her."

"Good." Peter looked at his watch. "I'll give you an hour. Then I'll call Olive." And with that understanding Garrison took his leave.

Before the hour was up Olive called Peter. "Will you go with Tony and me to see the district attorney?" she asked, omitting preliminaries.

"But Olive-"

"It's too late to object," she put in. "I've already 'phoned him and made an appointment. I hoped to see him this evening, but he hasn't the time. We're to see him at his home tomorrow morning at eight-thirty. Can you be there? You see, you know some of the facts of the case at first hand, and I intend that he shall hear everything. Will you come?"

"Why-of course," he began.

"All right. Eight-thirty. Don't be late." She rang off.

Peter hung up the receiver, still gasping a little with astonishment.

CHAPTER XXI

AMAZING NEWS

PETER was the first to reach Fleming's house next morning, but Olive and Garrison arrived almost on his heels, the latter looking tired and pale, as if the night had been sleepless for him.

Olive appeared her usual self, or more than that. There was in her expression a superserenity, so to speak, that recalled to Peter the little girl in the swing, singing against hoots from the next yard. She was charmingly dressed in a tailored suit, soft, flattering furs, and an upturned hat that gave her blonde hair a chance to add its brightness to the color scheme. And as she smilingly held out her hand and thanked Peter for coming he had an awkward moment—such as one might feel who has been bidden to a wake and finds himself at a wedding, so unruffled was her countenance, so gallant her bearing.

Her fiancé, Peter guessed, did not share her exalted mood and was there against his own will and judgment. No doubt he had already sent his baggage to the dock and ordered a taxi.

When greetings were over silence fell upon the three. Peter was at a loss what to say, Garri-

son plainly had no impulse to speak, and Olive's thoughts appeared to soar far above their heads.

The district attorney did not keep them waiting, but came in almost immediately, newspaper in hand, as from the breakfast table. His first glance was naturally for the girl, and not until he had greeted her did he see and recognize Peter. On Garrison he expended only a short, curious stare.

Constituting herself spokesman Olive told her story, told it calmly and clearly, with the events in chronological order, and to the events she added no comment whatsoever. She was not there to make an appeal but to state facts; such, at least, was the impression she gave. And yet, the very directness and bareness of her narrative and her quiet tones and serene eyes were more potent arguments than any avowal of innocence would have been to the man she was addressing.

He listened in unbroken stillness until she had finished, betraying no astonishment or incredulity, though he must have felt both. When she paused he began to ask questions, first of her, then of the others, pinning points down with details that they personally vouched for.

It was on Garrison that he spent most time, and with him only did there creep into his questions a certain sharpness suggestive of cross examination.

"Have you ever attended a murder trial in Italy?" he asked suddenly.

The question was as unexpected a one as he could have hit on and Olive and Peter regarded him in astonishment. Garrison did not answer at once. He frowned and moved slightly in his seat.

"You have, I see," said Fleming.

"No," said Garrison.

"But you know what its most striking feature is—the confronting of the accuser with the accused?"

"Yes."

"It has always interested me," said Fleming, addressing the three of them. "And though it is utterly opposed to the principle and practice of our criminal law I have often wished for the right to employ it; it proves so effective at times. Well?" He paused, smiled a little, then continued in a whimsical tone: "I believe my chance to do so has come at last. With your permission I am going to ask Mr. Andrassy to come here and speak for himself. He lives nearby, and I think if I 'phone at once I may catch him before he goes downtown."

Fleming rose, then waited for possible objections. No one answered for a moment. It was not Peter's affair, so he merely looked from one to the other of his companions until Olive, after a glance at her fiancé, said quietly:

"Nothing could be better."

The district attorney turned to Garrison. "You don't object?"

"Certainly not," the latter replied, as calmly as Olive herself had spoken, and Fleming went

off to telephone.

Garrison took out his watch, glanced at it, and returned it to his pocket. Automatically Peter did the same. Olive rose and walked to a window. As she passed her lover she let her hand rest lightly for an instant on his shoulder. He looked up, but neither spoke, and when she reached the window she stood there with her back to the room.

Then in the stillness Peter became aware of the ticking of a clock, which emphasized the silence so sharply and unpleasantly that he got up too and began to walk about the room. Once he stopped before a framed parchment on the wall, the certificate of an honorary degree conferred on Fleming by some obscure university, and read it through. Then he looked around once more at Garrison. The latter had taken out his watch again.

The door opened and Fleming returned. Peter wheeled at the first sound of the knob and Olive started back to her chair. But something in the district attorney's face brought them both to a halt. He himself had stopped and was looking

from one to the other and then at Garrison with a curious, arresting intentness.

"Well? Is he coming?"

The voice was Olive's and it betrayed to Peter's ear that her nerves were slipping from her control.

"No," answered Fleming, not looking at her but at Garrison. "He has just been found dead in his bed."

"What!" Garrison took a step toward Fleming. "Dead? That's not true," he cried, staring at the older man. "You're just saying it."

The district attorney stared back at him. "It is true," he replied. "His butler told me so. He has just been found." Fleming turned to Peter. "The butler thinks his death was caused by heart disease," he added.

Peter said nothing. Olive had not moved. And now that conviction had replaced unbelief Garrison too stood dumb. He looked at his companions blankly, then down at the open watch in his hand. Mechanically he snapped it shut and put it in his pocket.

The sound broke the spell of amazement that seemed to possess the others, as if it had startled them back to a sense of reality, as well it might indeed. For what mattered the time, now that Andrassy was dead?

It was Fleming who put the feeling into words.

"Further discussion here seems to have become superfluous," he said. "So I must ask you to excuse me. I am going to walk over to Andrassy's house. I'd be glad to have you come with me, Doctor Bennett."

"Doctor, this case begins to interest me," he remarked a little later, after they had parted with Garrison and Olive and were on their way. "Three of a kind is a pretty fair hand. I'm in this game to the finish."

CHAPTER XXII

THE THIRD DEAD MAN

A FOOTMAN opened the door. His excited face reflected the condition of the household, and the announcement of Fleming's identity rendered him speechless—or almost so, for he did succeed in conveying the fact of their arrival to the butler, who appeared to be in command.

The latter, at the district attorney's request, took them to his dead master's bedroom.

"Raise the shade, please," said Fleming on finding the room in semi-darkness. "Have you notified the police?"

"Yes, sir."

The shades up, the two men crossed to the bed where Andrassy's head alone was visible above the covering.

"Pull down the covers," directed Fleming. "What a physique!" He exclaimed in admiration of the big, finely muscled body.

Peter made an examination which revealed nothing. "I think Mr. Andrassy's regular physician should be called," he said.

"I have already telephoned to Dr. Taussig,

sir," replied the butler. "He should arrive at

any moment now."

Peter regarded the speaker searchingly, tantalized again by the feeling he had had in Kala's rooms that he had seen him before. Franz Hofer? But there was no time now to fine-comb his memory.

"It was you who found him?" the district at-

torney was saying.

"Yes, sir," answered the butler. "I had orders never to let him sleep after nine o'clock, no matter how late he went to bed. He was most particular about getting downtown at the same time every morning. Usually he woke of himself, but if he had not rung for me by nine I woke him."

"Had he no valet?"

"His valet has been ill for a fortnight. I have been performing his duties as well as my own."

"I see. Did Mr. Andrassy complain of feeling sick yesterday?"

"No, sir—at least, not to me, sir."

"How did he spend the day?"

"He lunched at the Hispanic Club with a friend, Mr. Perez. I 'phoned and made the appointment. It was about five, as I remember, when he came back, and after dinner—he dined alone—he went out again. I don't know where he went nor when he returned. I went to bed at eleven."

[&]quot;Who is Mr. Perez?"

"A South American, sir. I don't know his business." The butler turned toward the door. "Someone is coming," he said. "Dr. Taussig, perhaps. I heard the door-bell ring."

The newcomer was Taussig, a stout, intelligent-looking, middle-aged person. Fleming introduced himself and Peter, and he gave the history of the case as he had just heard it.

Dr. Taussig listened closely, asked a few questions, then examined the corpse. "Been dead some time," he observed, with a glance at Peter, who nodded assent.

"Is this the position he was found in?" The question was to Hofer and at his affirmative answer Taussig frowned and focussed his glance more sharply on the man. Then he looked around the room slowly and attentively, after which he walked over, opened the bathroom door and looked in.

"May I see you alone for a few minutes?" he asked, turning and addressing himself to Fleming. "You will pardon us, doctor?"

"Certainly," Peter replied, moving as he spoke toward the door.

"Please don't leave the house, Doctor Bennett," Fleming said, and Peter answered that he would wait downstairs.

Hofer took him down in the elevator, which gave him a chance to study the butler unobserved. His first impression was that he looked older by

daylight and less wooden. He was, in fact, haggard, and had the sort of look about the eyes that always made Peter ask a patient how he was sleeping—the same strained look that Garrison had had. Hofer, he thought, had reason to be disturbed; a good post such as he had had with Andrassy was not easily found. But where had he seen the man before?

"Would you care to see the pictures while you wait, sir?" the butler asked when they arrived at the ground floor, and at an indifferent assent from Peter he led the way to the drawing-room. "A gloomy morning, sir," he remarked as he crossed to a window to raise a shade.

Peter looked after him idly, watching his deliberate yet deft movements. Then, in a flash, as Hofer's face came into full daylight, Peter saw another face, the one this so hauntingly resembled—the face of the man who had fainted at the Panharmonic concert.

It was almost grotesque, a likeness between faces so unlike; one, wild-eyed, twitching, frightened, the other, stolid, with quiet, steady gaze. Despite his relief at having tracked down the elusive memory, Peter stared after Hofer's retreating figure with a feeling of disappointment that his perplexity about the man had sprung from a mere chance resemblance.

He turned to the paintings on the walls about him, but found himself in no mood for them, and presently wandered over to the hall door, which he hardly reached before he heard the click of the elevator and saw the district attorney approaching.

"Doctor Bennett," said Fleming when he had joined Peter, "you will be interested to hear that Dr. Taussig is of the same opinion regarding Andrassy's death that you hold about Kala's, that it was not due to heart disease. Also, as he has been Mrs. Zarady's physician for several years and has never known her husband to be ill, he doesn't believe that he could have had an obscure malady that caused his death. He thinks, as I do, that Zarady's death must be in some way connected with the other two, or, at least, that the three together form a sequence that should be investigated. Now, owing to your first-hand knowledge of Kala's case, he believes that your presence would be valuable, if you have the time to go with us to see Mrs. Zarady."

"Mrs. Zarady?" echoed Peter in surprise.

Fleming explained. The idea was Dr. Taussig's; he was now telephoning to Mrs. Zarady to ask if she would see them. They hoped to learn from her something about her husband's associations that would give them a working clew.

"We have no clew whatever as to the cause of death either in the Kala or the Andrassy case," said Fleming. "An examination of Andrassy's stomach will be made, as was done with Kala's, but the result will doubtless be the same. The three deaths were probably caused in the same way and by the same person; but who the person is, and how and why he committed these murders remains to be discovered."

"It is certainly very puzzling," said Peter.

"Yes, and yet the fact of there being three of them ought to simplify the problem, for there must be points common to all that should guide us. The motive, for one thing. It must have been the same in all of them. And there isn't a wide choice in murder motives—robbery, jealousy, revenge, and a few others. Now, robbery was obviously not the motive here. And a man is not jealous of three other men at the same time—to the point of killing them. No, I do not think this is a woman case, at all. The motive, I feel sure, must have been revenge."

"Then the three had a common enemy."

"Say, rather, a common victim. Doctor, did you ever see James O'Neil play Monte Cristo?"

"No, but I've read the book."

"That's not the same thing. If you had seen the play you would remember, if you remembered nothing else, his tone and manner when he counted 'One,' 'Two,' 'Three,' after the successive deaths of the men against whom he had sworn vengeance for the wrong they had done him in his youth. Perhaps it is fantastic, but I have a notion that somebody has echoed that count after these three deaths."

"Somebody whom all three had wronged?"

"Yes—years ago, perhaps."

"But Kala was so young."

"He was Zarady's son." Fleming paused, the light of a new idea in his eyes. "I wonder if there might not be some special significance in that fact," he mused, then added: "But this is wild speculation. We'd better stick to facts. What is the name of that wine? I may wish to ask Mrs. Zarady about it. If her husband was fond of Hungarian wines she may know something about them. There must have been some reason for using that particular brand."

"Máslás Szeged is the name," said Peter.

"Thanks. I haven't told Dr. Taussig about the wine, nor about Miss Thrace and Garrison, and I should prefer you not to mention them unless I bring up the subject. Ah, here's the doctor now."

CHAPTER XXIII

A PAINFUL CONFESSION

OCTOR TAUSSIG'S car took him to Mrs. Zarady's apartment, and Fleming and Peter were left in the big, two-storied studio that served as living-room while Taussig went to fetch Mrs. Zarady.

The two men examined their surroundings with interest, partly for whatever they might reveal of the life of the dad musician, and partly for their own sake. High, frosted windows that stretched to the ceiling formed one end of the long room, the adjoining walls were hung with tapestries, and the far end was cut by a staircase leading to a balcony and upper story. Fine rugs, old carved furniture, rich embroideries, rare bibelots, all beautiful in themselves and beautifully blended, combined to produce an effect that was artistic and luxurious and made a stranger look forward with curiosity to the appearance of the mistress.

The waiting in this instance was not long, Mrs. Zarady appeared after a very few minutes at the top of the stairs and descended them leaning on Dr. Taussig's arm and looking so ill that

Peter wondered at her physician's subjecting her to what could not but be an ordeal.

She greeted them with gentle graciousness and took a seat in one of the big, carved chairs, a frail looking woman of forty with charming features but sallow skin and graying hair. Her dark eyes moved uncertainly from one to the other.

"It's very good of you to see us," said Fleming.
"Dr. Taussig has no doubt told you why we have come."

She inclined her head silently.

"We hoped you might be able to throw a little light on several points that are puzzling us in connection with Mr. Zarady's sudden death," continued Fleming, thinking it better to be direct and make the interview as brief as possible. "To begin with, may I ask if you yourself feel entirely satisfied with the accepted view as to your husband's death?"

"That it was his heart? Yes."

"Then he did have heart disease? You knew that?"

"Yes."

The questioner paused here, baffled by the unexpected replies.

"It was a doctor in Hungary who told me years ago," Mrs. Zarady explained. "He did not tell my husband for fear of alarming him. But he warned me that the disease might develop very

quickly under any unusual excitement or strain. That was why I tried to persuade Mr. Zarady to give up the concert that evening. He was not well, he admitted it. But he was unwilling to disappoint the audience."

Another pause. Fleming looked at Taussig, and as if reading the glance the widow said quickly: "Did Dr. Taussig not tell you this? He knew it."

Taussig answered. "I told Mr. Fleming only what I knew personally of Mr. Zarady's health, which was that I had never known of his being ill," he said.

Mrs. Zarady stared at him, a glint of suspicion in her eyes, then she turned to the district attorney.

"Dr. Taussig did not know of my husband being ill," she said, "because Mr. Zarady never consulted a doctor in this country. He had no confidence in American physicians. But he always took medical advice when we went to Europe in the summer."

"I'm interested to know that," Fleming replied. "I had the impression that your husband's death was quite unexpected to you. You must pardon me if I insist upon questioning you, but there are some very puzzling sides to the case. I have learned, for instance, that your husband was recently examined for life insurance and was found in excellent physical condition."

"Life insurance? My husband carried no life insurance," said Mrs. Zarady.

"It—seems that he did," returned Fleming, faltering a little over his unpleasant task. "He took out a policy about a month ago in favor of—Rudolf Kala.

The woman's pale face flushed, then whitened, and her dark eyes showed an instant of fire before the lids dropped to screen them.

"I know nothing of such a policy," she answered with excellent self-control.

"There is no doubt that it exists," said Fleming, going doggedly ahead. "And that is why Mr. Kala's death, following so quickly on Mr. Zarady's, has raised a question as to the real cause—"

"I know nothing about the cause of Mr. Kala's death."

"Of course not. I spoke rather of Mr. Zarady's," said Fleming. "However, we will leave that for the present. Now, as to Mr. Andrassy, do you object to telling me something of your husband's relations with him? They were friends, were they not?"

Mrs. Zarady did not reply at once. But her tense form relaxed and she sat back in her chair, as if the change of subject had eased a strain. Nevertheless her eyes searched her questioner's face with a half-frowning stare.

"Yes, they were friends," she said.

"Had they known each other long?"

"Ever since we came to this country, eleven years ago. We were all Hungarians, and Mr. Andrassy has always taken an interest in musicians."

"They must then have had many acquaintances in common?"

"Yes, naturally."

"Among these acquaintances do you know of anyone whom—they particularly disliked—with whom they had perhaps had a disagreement of some kind—someone whom you might—well, call their enemy?"

"Enemy?" She repeated the word in astonishment. Plainly she did not catch the drift of the inquiry.

"Were Mr. Andrassy and your husband ever in any kind of business enterprise together?" asked Fleming, trying a new tack.

"Business enterprise? No," was the answer. "But—I don't understand why you ask me these questions? Why don't you go to Mr. Andrassy?"

The district attorney looked over at Taussig, wondering why he had failed to inform Mrs. Zarady of Andrassy's death; but Taussig was watching her.

"I took for granted that Dr. Taussig had told you about Mr. Andrassy. He is dead," said Fleming.

"Dead!"

"He was found dead in his bed this morning." She half-rose, then sank back again. Her eyes flew to Taussig for confirmation of the statement, received it in a solemn nod of his head, then returned to Fleming. Again she made a movement as if to rise, but again sank back. The three men watched her in amazement, so incomprehensible was her perturbation.

At last, with a sudden lift of her head and a deep-drawn breath, as of utter relief, she spoke.

"I can tell the truth now," she said. "My husband did not die of heart disease. I killed him."

It was incredible. Yet it was also incredible that she should make such an assertion unless it were true. It must be true. But, as Peter and Fleming tried to grasp it as a reality, they were assailed by the questions it failed to answer, the puzzles it left unsolved.

Her story was pathetic, and so humiliating a one for a woman to tell that the three men who listened marveled at her composure. Fleming understood it better than the others, for he had heard such stories in the courtroom, told with the same lack of visible feeling, and he knew that when a woman thus cast aside feminine vanity and natural human pride and calmly laid bare her life she had, for the time, ceased to be herself; nature had mercifully inhibited normal emotion in her.

Mrs. Zarady's marriage had been unhappy, a failure. She had not succeeded in holding her husband's interest, if indeed she had ever really had it. He had been unfaithful again and again. Still she had clung, the slave of her passion, too blinded by it to see the hopelessness of clinging. She did not say this, of course; she merely revealed it as the essential background of her narrative.

Late on Saturday afternoon, the day before her husband's death, Theodore Andrassy had come to her with the tale of her husband's infatuation for a new protégée, Olive Thrace. The affair could be nipped in the bud, he said, if Mrs. Zarady would follow his advice and prevent the concert at which the girl was to make her debut the following evening, for by Monday another man, whom the girl really cared for, would be back in New York and in control of the situation. Andrassy's suggestion was that Zarady be given some harmless drug with a nauseating effect, so as to make his appearance at the concert impossible.

His wife, however, had not been able to bring herself to carry out this plan, although she had agreed to it. Not only was she unwilling to make her husband ill, but she had no faith in the scheme. At best it would provide only a temporary check to his infatuation. It occurred to her that if she could somehow drug Olive

Thrace so as to make her sing badly Zarady's interest would quickly subside, for he had no patience with failure.

Accordingly, that evening, she sent her maid, a young Hungarian girl, to a wine dealer's to get a bottle of wine, a very poor brand of Tokav that she felt confident her husband would not touch. and into the wine she put some sleeping powders that she kept for her own use. Accustomed as she had been all her life to wine drinking, it seemed to her that Olive Thrace would not fail to try the wine, which would have a stupefying effect and cause her performance to fall short of Zarady's expectations. Getting the wine into the dressing-room had been a simple matter. The maid, who often took messages to Zarady from his wife and was well known to the stage doorman, had no difficulty in slipping into the room unseen.

The tragic culmination of the plan had hurled Mrs. Zarady into the depths of grief and remorse. Only Andrassy's pleading that night had kept her silent. The truth would ruin him, he declared.

"But he is dead now, nothing can hurt him," she said in conclusion. "For myself, I don't care what is done to me." And it was obvious that she did not.

Dr. Taussig spoke now. "Those powders, what were they?" he asked. "The ones I gave you?"

"Yes."

He heaved a sigh of relief. "Then you didn't kill your husband," he said emphatically and appealed to Peter, naming the drug the powders contained. Peter confirmed his assertion.

"That wouldn't have done anything more than make him drowsy," Taussig went on to Mrs. Zarady, "even if his heart had been weak, and it was not weak, was it?"

"No," she spoke tremulously, not yet daring to believe herself guiltless of her husband's death. "It was not true, what I said about a doctor in Hungary, or about my husband being ill before the concert. Mr. Andrassy told me to say that. My husband was never ill."

"I thought not," said Taussig. "And that being the case he did not die of heart disease. What then killed him? That is what the district attorney is trying to discover. That is why he asked you if Mr. Zarady had an enemy."

"I'm sure he had not," she began, and then, overcome by the greatness of her relief she lost her self-control and broke into sobs.

Dr. Taussig took her back to her room and the ministrations of her maid, then returned. "Thank heaven," he exclaimed fervently, "this has turned out as it has. I suppose you wondered at my bringing you here. It was for her sake. I knew she had something on her mind connected with her husband's death, something that was wearing her life out. I had tried to make her talk about it and had failed. Thank God, all she needs now is time to compose herself and forget that beast."

He turned away and his companions exchanged glances, thinking that he also seemed in need of time to compose himself. His feeling was certainly beyond the normal solicitude of a physician for his patient, but as he was unmarried no one could find fault with him for that, and no one, after hearing Mrs. Zarady's story, could help hoping that she might indeed forget "that beast."

"I'll talk to her later," Taussig went on. "It is possible she may remember something of value to you."

"Thanks," said Fleming, and he and Peter took their leave.

"Well, doctor," said the district attorney, "that disposes of our best clew, the wine. And, unfortunately, we have no second best. There's nothing for it now but to hunt up that girl in the squirrel cap."

CHAPTER XXIV

A DISAPPEARANCE

Peter at once telephoned Olive that her troubles were over, that something had been discovered which completely exonerated her and Garrison. What this was he promised to explain later, but he made the promise with a mental reservation. Mrs. Zarady's story would not be easy to tell her, considering her part in it, so he meant to tell it to Garrison and let him pass it on to Olive.

The fact was, Peter was in no mood for seeing Olive. He shrank from the sight of her happiness, her radiant face, for even the thought of it brought back another face, not happy. That poor little girl, that helpless, frightened child, hunted down by the police, like a criminal! It was as well for Peter that he had a busy day.

About six o'clock Fleming called up. He was on his way home, he said, and would appreciate it if Peter would meet him there for a few minutes' talk. Peter went with a heavy heart. They had

found the girl, he thought, and put her on the rack, and now they wanted to know why he had not told of his encounter with her on the evening of Kala's death?

This surmise, however, was wrong. They had not found the girl. The district attorney announced that fact at once.

"Kala seems to have been quite a ladies' pet," he said. "We've tracked down several women who consider his feeling for them to have been more than friendship. One of them is sure he committed suicide on her account, and she offers to consent reluctantly to having her picture in the papers as the object of his unrequited passion. But, unfortunately, neither she nor any of the others has ever been known to wear a squirrel cap. And the young person who does wear one doesn't seem anxious to have her picture in the papers. However, we shall soon find her.

"Not that I expect it to do us much good," Fleming went on. "As I've said before she is probably some silly young thing, in love with his music, who happened to be with him when he dropped dead and naturally took to her heels. If we weren't so entirely at sea, I'd leave her alone, but as it is we can't afford to neglect the slightest lead. This is a very baffling case, doctor."

Peter nodded in agreement but said nothing. He was wondering what he had been summoned for. "These three men were poisoned, there's no doubt of that," continued Fleming. "But how? The drug was not taken into the stomach, that seems sure. It must have been administered in some other way. Tradition has it that the old Italians poisoned by means of flowers and gloves, but no suspicious object that might have served as a carrier of poison was found near Kala or—"

"Andrassy died in his sleep, apparently," said Peter.

"Yes-apparently," replied Fleming after a pause. "So you see we don't get far along that line of inquiry. I'm inclined to think we shall never know how these murders were committed until we discover who committed them. And, having no direct clew to the murderer the only thing to do is to look about for somebody with a motive for the crimes. So far I have found only Garrison. Perez-the friend of Andrassy's, with whom he lunched yesterday, you remember-came to see me today. He accused Garrison flatly of all three deaths, and I must admit that he made out a fairly good case against him. He says that Garrison killed Zarady with poisoned wine in order to save Miss Thrace from him, and then killed Kala and Andrassy because they knew of his crime and were about to accuse him of it. "

"Mrs. Zarady's story disposes of that theory."

"As far as the wine goes, yes. But the fact remains, as Perez points out, that Garrison had access to all three men shortly before their death. He called to see Kala about four o'clock Saturday; Andrassy visited him about the same time on Sunday; and while he didn't see Zarady, perhaps—we don't know that he didn't—Miss Thrace did. Now, add to the fact that Garrison did have something to gain by all three deaths—"

"What has Perez to gain by accusing Garrison, I wonder?" put in Peter.

"Andrassy was his friend, that's motive enough," answered Fleming. "But it was not to discuss these phases of the case that I asked you to come here. There is another point that interests me more—the time of day that the deaths occurred. Zarady's was shortly before nine, Kala's between eight and nine, and Andrassy's-well, I'm wondering if he too did not die about the same time. The butler said that when he went to bed at eleven Andrassy had not yet come in, but Andrassy's stomach was found full of undigested food. A late supper, perhaps, but where did he have the supper? Where did he go, if he went out as Hofer said? We have found nobody who saw him, and he was known to thousands by sight. He didn't take one of his own machines, he didn't take a taxi. He walked or took a street car. Yet nobody saw him. Doctor, what do you know about this man Hofer?"

"Why-nothing," said Peter, taken aback by

the abrupt question.

"You saw him at Kala's apartment Saturday evening. How did he impress you? How did he act?" asked Fleming.

"About as he acted this morning when you saw him," Peter answered, though all he could recall at the moment of the butler's behavior was the tense stare he had had from him.

"He was alone, you know, in Kala's rooms before they were examined, and had time to remove any evidence he may have found—to rinse out that glass in the bathroom, for instance. And in the case of Andrassy he had ample time for anything. He was the only servant in the house during the entire afternoon and evening, with the exception of the cook and kitchen maid, who were in the basement. It was Sunday and Andrassy was to dine alone, so he let the other servants go, he said. Andrassy did dine alone, served by him. Then, I think, Andrassy died and Hofer took him upstairs, on the elevator, and put him to bed."

Peter looked his astonishment. "Have you accused him of this?" he asked.

"No," answered Fleming. "He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Disappeared. None of the other servants seem to know anything about him. They say he received no mail and had no callers, and his room in the house was as bare and impersonal as a hotel room, not a book or a photograph or a scrap of writing in it. It has always been so, the others say—nothing but his clothes and a few toilet articles. What do you make of it, Doctor Bennett?"

Peter shook his head, utterly at sea.

. "I wonder if he may not be our old friend, Monte Cristo, in disguise?"

"The victim turned avenger?"
The district attorney nodded.

CHAPTER XXV

EVADING THE POLICE

PETER had had no opportunity during the day to see Garrison to tell him of the morning interview with Mrs. Zarady and after the talk with Fleming he did not wish to see him. He did not wish to talk of the case, nor even to think of it.

Hoping to get the matter off his mind for a time in agreeable company, he went to his club for dinner, but there chance threw him into the clutches of a garrulous bore, and while he returned absent-minded replies to the chatter that assailed his ears his thoughts ran on in the old groove.

The minute the meal was over he returned home. He would, he thought, put in the evening on a medical article he had been planning for some time to write, for that was a task to absorb his full attention. Accordingly, he began at once to frame his opening paragraphs.

He found when he reached his office that Olive had called him up, but as she had left no message except her name he ignored it. Probably she had only wanted to remind him that he had not yet "explained." Perhaps, after all, he ought to see Garrison, as he had intended. But no, it might be wiser not.

Thus irresolute, he sat down and began to transfer to paper the sentences he had composed. One paragraph was finished to his satisfaction and he was midway in the second when he was halted by the ringing of the bell of his private entrance. He did not at first move to answer it, for in the absence of his office attendant it was his custom to ignore that bell and oblige the person ringing to apply at the main entrance of the building. But when the ringing continued it so distracted him that he at last got up and went to the door. In the vestibule he found a girl, the girl whose frightened face had haunted him for forty-eight hours.

"Oh! I was so afraid you were out!" she cried.

He had an instant of sheer surprise, then he noticed that despite the relief in her voice she was still frightened—and still wore her fur cap.

"I came back for my boa," she hurried on. "I left it here the night I fainted. Don't you remember?"

"Come in," he answered.

"I can't." She made a little childish movement of retreat as he swung the door wide. "I just want my fur, please."

"It's so cold, you'd better come in," he urged,

and when she stepped into the hall, "A fur boa, you say?" he asked.

"Oh-isn't it here?" She was quick to catch

the vagueness of his tone.

"What kind of fur is it?" he asked, waving her toward the reception room and following her in.

"Squirrel-like my cap," she answered anx-

iously.

He looked at the cap, wondering how best to handle his difficult problem. It was clear that she knew nothing of the search being made for her and he shrank from telling her of it, shrank from the new terror it would bring to her eyes, already so full of trouble. How big they looked in her small, white face, smaller and paler even than when he had seen her before.

"Why did you run away from me the other evening?" he asked, smiling down at her gently, hoping to reassure her by a quiet, friendly manner.

"I—was in a hurry. I couldn't wait," she answered. "Oh, please give me my boa."

"I don't believe that's altogether true—is it?"

he went on, in the same easy, kindly tone.

She gave him a quick glance and drew back. "I want my fur. I—want to go," she faltered.

"Something has happened to frighten you," he said. "But there's nothing to be afraid of here with me. I'm your friend and I'm going to help

you. Something has—gorie wrong for you, I know that, and I'm going to help you to make it all right again."

"It can't be made right again," she whispered brokenly, and then, alarmed at her incautious words, she added in hasste: "I must go. Please give me my fur."

"I can't," he told her gently. "You didn't

leave it here. You left it-up there."

A gulp of fright broke from her blanched lips. He took her trembling hands in his. "Don't be afraid," he said. "You're all right with me, and I don't believe you have anything to be really afraid of anyhow-—not for yourself, have you?"

She stared a moment, then shook her head.

"I knew it. I was sure of it. Now come and sit down a minute and tell me what's worrying you."

"No, no, I can't tell you anything!" She pulled her hands free of his and made for the door. "I

must go.

He barred the way. "Where are you going?"

"I can't tell you. Please let me out."

He shook his head. "I can't do that, for your own sake," he said, gently still but in a firmer tone than he had used before. "I can't let you leave here now, because—they are looking for you."

She stared. "Who?"

"The—the people who are investigating Mr. Kala's death." He hesitated, then blurted out

the unpleasant worder for in the end she would have to know. "The police."

"Oh!" She clasped I'rer hands wildly. "What

shall I do?"

"That's what we musts decide," said Peter, as simply and lightly as in the question were an every-day one for him. 'So come and sit down here like a sensible little girl and we'll talk it over. First I'll tell you what I know, and then you'll tell me what—"

"I can't tell you anything —not anything," she protested; but she sat down and watched silently while he drew up a chair for thimself, her eyes fastened upon his face with childish expec-

tancy.

He gazed back for a moment wit hout speaking, then without a word leaned over and took her hand again. She looked so little and lonely in

the big chair.

"Now, it's like this," he began, studying her face for the effect of each syllable. "They found your boa, so they know you were up there. That's why they are looking for you. You see, they don't know just what was the matter with Mr. Kala, whether he was taken ill very suddenly, or —or killed himself, perhaps, or—what happened. And they think if they can find you you can tell them, because you were there when he died."

"But I wasn't!"

The emphatic denial brought her bolt upright

in her chair, but in a moment her small figure had drooped again and anguish came into her eyes.

"He was already dead," she wailed despairingly. "I was too late." Sinking against the chair arm she broke into a storm of sobbing.

Too late? Then she had come to warn Kala! He looked down at the slender, shaking form. What wretched secret was the poor child hiding? Whom was she shielding?

He let her have her cry out, knowing that it would relieve her nerves and put her in a more normal and rational state of mind. Nevertheless it took all his self-control to sit dumbly by and let the medicine do its work. The minute her sobs grew quieter he patted her and implored her not to cry any more, promising recklessly that everything in the world was going to be all right from that time forth.

At last she sat up and wiped her eyes, digging a handkerchief from her coat pocket for the purpose. "I'm sorry I cried and was such a bother," she said, her eyes averted. "But we—were engaged—once."

"Engaged?" he echoed, surprised. "To be married? You and Kala?"

"Yes. But he didn't——" She broke off, struggling against a renewal of her tears. "He wanted to wait," she finished finally.

"Well—" Peter stopped, not knowing what to say, for he wanted her to talk and was afraid

of startling her into silence. "Well, I think he was right," he remarked at last in a casual way. "You were too young. You're just a little girl."

"I'll be seventeen next month," she replied

with quaint dignity.

"But that's not so very old," he said soberly. "Quite a lot of girls marry after they're seventeen."

She looked away and again her face, still flushed from weeping, worked to keep back her tears. Then she looked around and gave him a square, brave glance. "That wasn't why," she said. "He didn't want to marry me—ever."

"Oh," Peter murmured on a note of protest.

"He said so. He didn't love me any more."
Peter hesitated, then risked the question:
"When did he say so?"

She seemed about to answer, but suddenly started up, recalled to a realization of her whereabouts. "I must go," she exclaimed nervously.

"You're forgetting," he answered. "We're going to have a talk and decide what to do. I'm going to help you. You believe that, don't you?"

Her glance fluttered away and back again. "You've been very kind to me," she conceded.

"But you don't trust me?"

"Yes—I trust you," she faltered.

"Then sit down again."

"But I can't tell you anything—not anything."

"All right. But you've already told me one

thing, that you went to Mr. Kala's rooms to warn him about something. What was it?"

"I——" She thought a moment and deciding, apparently, that she could answer without revealing anything vital, she went on: "I went to beg him not to go to Mr. Andrassy's."

"Why not?"

"That's all I can tell you."

"All right. And when you got there he was dead?"

"Yes." She shivered as if reliving a terrible moment.

"How did you get into the room?"

"The door was unlocked."

"Why didn't you go upstairs in the elevator?"

"I should have had to give my name to be telephoned up, and I was afraid he might refuse to see me." Flushing at the painful admission, she hurried on. "I knew he must be at home, because he wasn't at the Andrassy house. I had just been there and they told me he hadn't come yet."

"Who told you?" A sudden idea had seized

Peter.

"A man—a servant—that opened the door."

"What sort of looking man was he?"

"Why—I don't know." She seemed surprised by the question. "I didn't notice him."

"Don't you know whether he was young or middle-aged?"

She shook her head. "Why?" she asked.

He did not explain. The thought that had prompted his inquiry was a most disturbing one. Had Hofer seen the girl and noticed her fur cap, and was that the reason he had stared so at Peter when mention of the cap caused the latter to start? If so, he could hardly have failed to wonder. But that was not a thing to tell her now.

"I'm sorry I didn't notice him," she said in a meek little voice when her question went unanswered. "But—I was so excited."

"Of course you were," assented Peter in his former tone of quiet sympathy. "Then you came right here? And you found the door unlocked and went in, and—what then?"

"He was on the floor—dead." She shuddered again and hid her face with her hands.

Gently Peter drew the hands down and held them in his, looking squarely into her eyes. "What killed him?" he ventured to ask in the quietest way.

"I don't know," she whispered back.

"Who killed him?"

"I-Oh, I can't tell you! I can't tell you anything!" She sprang to her feet. "I told you I

couldn't!" she cried reproachfully.

"That's true, you did," he admitted, manner and voice contrite. He felt indeed that he had been unfair, justifiably or not, and would press her no further. "I am not going to ask you to

tell me anything more," he promised. "Now we must think what to do. Do many of your friends know of your acquaintance with Mr. Kala?"

"I haven't any friends."

They were standing now, and from his height above her he could not see her eyes when she answered, but he noted the firmer set of her chin, a sudden tensing of her whole body.

"Your parents must have known of your engagement."

"I haven't any parents."

"Any brothers or sisters?"

"No."

"No relatives of any kind?"

"No. No-one at all-in the whole world."

Of course that was not true, he thought; it was just childish exaggeration.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"In a room I rent," she answered. "But I can't tell you where," she added, hastily forestalling him.

"Have you any money?"

"Yes."

This was not true, either. He did not have to see her eyes to know that. He had asked the question of too many sick girls in rented rooms and heard them say "yes" not to know how the word sounded when it was untrue. But never before had the brave little lie sent such a stab of pain through his heart.

"I'm going to earn some right away," she declared, as if sensing his doubt. "I've got a place to work. I'm going to begin tonight."

"Tonight? What sort of work?"

She looked up, startled by his tone, for despite his will he had not kept out of his voice the distress he felt.

"I—I'm going to play the piano," she faltered.

"I can't tell you that."

"In a moving-picture theatre, of course!" He wheeled and strode away, wondering what sort of place would employ a sixteen year old girl in such a position, seeing her in some cheap, dingy hole, wearing herself out only to creep back at midnight to a comfortless lodging.

Thank Heaven, there was a way to stop that! "You can't go. You must see that you can't" he said, coming back to her. "The police are on the lookout for you everywhere. It's a marvel you've escaped them so long."

His bluntness must have been convincing, for she looked about her wildly. "What shall I do?"

she asked herself in a terrified whisper.

"Listen," said Peter. "I have an old friend—Mrs. Ryan—the nicest, kindest old lady in the world. I'm going to take you to her house—just down on Long Island. She often looks after girls who need country air. I'll 'phone for my car and we'll go right away. And tomorrow,

after you've had a good night's sleep I'll come back for you, and whatever you decide you want to do you shall do it. Is it a bargain?"

"Can't they find me there?"

"Last place they'll think of looking."

"Then I'll go-thank you."

"Fine! Now you sit down a minute while I call up the garage." He turned away to put his purpose into instant execution; then, remembering her previous flight from that room, he came back.

"Take off your cap," he said. "The police would know you by it. You see, the door porter here noticed your wearing it the other evening and told the police about it. Too bad you went out that way. If you had only waited here I'd have let you out by my door and no one would have seen you."

She took the cap off and handed it to him without a word, and then, for a moment, he stood and looked down at her with a smile of encouragement. With her short brown hair, curling about her ears she appeared even younger than she was, and so little and simple and sweet.

He locked the cap safely away, then ordered his car. Fortunately his driver was off for the evening, so he had not even to manufacture an excuse to get rid of him. The garage was near and he was hardly ready with coats and robes and a veil of Miss Ames' for his companion's head before the machine was at the door. A minute or two later when no one was passing they slipped away.

They stopped once before leaving the city for Peter to telephone Mrs. Ryan that they were coming. A booth telephone was safer for that purpose than his own, he thought. The message given he hurried back to his car, half fearful of finding it empty, but to his relief a pair of wide, sweet eyes peered up at him from the fur collar of his motor coat.

Snug in her warm wrappings the girl sat at his side in silence, answering only direct questions, and for long stretches of the journey he was silent, too, wondering what she was thinking, what concealing. Would she tell him everything later when he had succeeded in gaining her confidence?

Mrs. Ryan's home was not above an hour's ride and was a modest, farmlike place, somewhat off the popular lines of travel. A hearth fire was blazing in their honor in the living-room, a coffee pot was steaming in the kitchen, and Mrs. Ryan's arms were open at the open door.

"A new patient, Mother Ryan," said Peter smiling encouragingly at his companion, "Misser—" He stared blankly, glancing at the girl, having utterly forgotten to prepare for this moment. "Miss—er—Smith," he finished lamely, when no help came from her.

"Well now, if it ain't always the easy names that's the hardest," exclaimed Mrs. Ryan without a hint of suspicion in her kind old eyes. "I'm very glad you've come, my dear, and I hope you'll soon be feeling better. The coffee's ready and waiting. And there's doughnuts, doctor!" She smiled up happily at Peter.

"Had a hunch I was coming, eh?" he said,

laughing.

"Must have felt it in my bones," she assented. "'Cause I haven't made doughnuts for a week, or more'n that, I guess."

She was back from the kitchen with a tray so quickly that Peter had no chance for more than a few heartening words to the girl, but he noticed with relief that she was already looking less nervous and frightened. Dear guileless Mother Ryan was just the medicine she needed.

He made short work of his cup of coffee and got up to go, compensating his hostess for not emptying the plate of doughnuts before her delighted eyes by allowing her to stuff his pocket with them. Then when she ran off at his bidding to see that the guest's bedroom was properly warm he seized his opportunity to say goodbye.

"You're not going to run away from me again, are you?" he asked, smiling down into the sweet, upturned eyes. "You'll stay here with Mother Ryan until I come back, won't you?"

She nodded. "When will you come?" she asked eagerly. "Tomorrow?"

"If I can," he answered. "But if I don't you mustn't worry. I've got to be careful, you see, for your sake. Something might turn up that would make it unwise for me to come here—if I were being watched, I mean—"

"You? Oh—you've got yourself into trouble

to help me!"

"No, no," he assured her, berating himself for his stupidity.

"You have! I'm so sorry," she lamented.

"No, no. I was just supposing something that might happen, but won't, I'm sure. You'll see. I'll be here tomorrow."

"But you mustn't—if you're not sure it's all right to. Oh, I wish I hadn't let you——"

"It's going to be all right," he repeated, pressing her hand. "Promise me you won't worry."

"But I couldn't bear it if you got in trouble," she cried. "You've been so kind to me. And —I don't see why you should have been."

There was no suggestion of coquetry nor of suspicion in her words. They were merely an honest admission that she had no claim on him and was corespondingly grateful for what he had done for her.

"I'm your friend and friends always help each other, that's why," he said. Then, because she

was so little and so alone, and because "friend" sounded formal and cold, and not at all as he felt toward her, he added: "And because I—like you."

"I like you, too."

He almost smiled, her polite little return of civility was so quaint; but not for the world would he have spoiled the innocent gravity of the moment.

"I'm glad. Then we can be good friends," he answered, as simply and seriously as she herself had spoken, giving her hand another little squeeze before dropping it at Mrs. Ryan's approach.

Speeding back to New York he relived that little scene and it brought him then no wish to smile. Instead, he stared frowningly before him with bent head.

"My lord!" he exclaimed aloud to the night suddenly. "Like her? Why, I love her! And I don't even know her name."

If it be true that all the world loves a lover, it is also true that a lover loves all the world. From the moment Peter knew himself to be in love all that had seemed so wrong gave way to a magic certainty that everything was most gloriously right—or soon would be. It was simply impossible that in such a wonderful world anything should ever be wrong again.

A born defender of the helpless, love made him only the more himself, with his innate desire to help and heal and protect doubled and redoubled. He would soon, he promised himself, have the color back in her cheeks, joy back in her eyes. And he would change her "I like you," into something that chimed better with the song in his heart.

Her face blotted out every other mental image. He wanted only that and the stars, and he chose the less-traveled roads in order to avoid distractions. But when he neared New York he roused himself. The world was a place for work, not for dreaming, and he was likely to need all his wits at any moment now. To begin with, he had better replenish his gasoline supply, merely as a precaution to avoid possible inquiry later as to his long night trip.

He did this at the first opportunity as it turned out. Then as he continued westward from the bridge after entering the city and found himself near Garrison's studio he remembered his unfulfilled intention of going there that evening. Why not now? It was barely past eleven. If there was a light he would stop.

There was a light, but when he rang the artist's street bell there came no answering click of the lock. Either the bell was not working or Garrison had gone out and left his lights on. However, as the door of the building was unlocked—as usually happened in such places—Peter decided to go upstairs and knock at the studio door, just to make sure.

He knocked, not expecting a response, but one came, instant and amazing. The door flew open, a low voice said: "Hands up," and he found himself facing a pistol with behind it the impassive countenance of Theodore Andrassy's butler.

"Oh—it's you, doctor," said Hofer the next moment, lowering his weapon. "Come in."

Peter hesitated, then entered.

"Mr. Garrison is not here," observed Hofer in his quiet voice. "He appears to have left in a hurry."

CHAPTER XXVI

A MIDNIGHT CAPTURE

HE studio was in confusion, with an open trunk in the middle of it and wearing apparel scattered about on furniture and floor, the result seemingly of haste and excitement.

"What can have happened, doctor?" said Hofer. "Why should Garrison have run away?"

The calm inquiries recalled Peter's startled gaze to the speaker. The man was the same and not the same. Both in his bearing and in his speech one felt a change. "What are you doing here?" Peter's composure matched the other's. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm here on business for the United States secret service," was the astonishing answer. "You have a car at the door. I am going to commandeer it and you, too. We are going after Garrison."

Peter was too astounded to reply at once. Besides, the words "going after" had sent a chill through him, warning him to speak warily.

Hofer had turned and switched off a light across the room. "We must start immediately; there is no time to waste," he remarked, making for the second switch on the wall near the door. "T will explain later."

"No, you'll explain now," said Peter firmly. "You wasted several minutes asking questions, you can waste a few answering them. What has happened? Why has Garrison gone away?"

"You ought to know, you're his friend, aren't you?" With the words Hofer touched the switch and the room turned black. "Now, doctor, we'll settle this right here. Remember, I'm armed and you're not."

"Turn on that light," ordered Peter, indignant at the trick. At the same time he felt for his pocket torch and the next moment it flashed on the spot where the ex-butler had been standing. There was no one there.

Peter wheeled automatically, and just in time to meet a spring at him from behind as the torch was knocked from his hand. But with the impact of the other's body against his own he was master of the situation. The attack was a familiar one to a wrestler and his muscles knew the answer to it. In a trice his hands had gripped his assailant's legs and at the same time giving them such a twist that when the two men went to the floor the next instant Peter was on top.

"You "All right, doctor," said Hofer.

win."

Peter did not move to release him, fearing an-

other ruse. Pinioning his opponent's arms with the weight of his body he felt for the pistol in his hand. Both hands were empty.

"In my pockets, doctor," said Hofer. "There are two of them. But hurry, please. There is

no time to lose."

Peter drew out the two weapons, then he got up, groped for the switch on the wall and brought back the light. Hofer had picked himself up, none the worse apparently, for he was smiling.

"You'll do, doctor," he declared in his calm way. "I wasn't quite sure of you, you see. Size doesn't always mean strength and courage. Now for your questions. Smell this." He caught up a handkerchief from the floor and held it to Peter's nose. "Chloroform—very careless work," he said. "As for the rest,"—his glance indicating the surrounding disorder—"very amateurish. Just what I should have expected from Perez."

"Perez?"

"Garrison has been drugged and carried off by Perez to be put aboard a tramp steamer bound for Brazil. Several attempts were made by Andrassy to induce him to go voluntarily. Now Andrassy is dead and Perez is using force. My guess is that he will be taken first to a house I know of on the New Jersey coast, and will from there be transferred by motor boat to the ship. I am going to that house tonight—with you or without you. Which is it to be?"

"With me," said Peter, holding out the pistols.

Hofer took one and slipped it into his pocket. "Keep the other," he said.

The lights out and the studio locked they left the place and were presently heading rapidly for New Jersey. Peter thought of his full gasoline tank with thankfulness, and when they reached their ferry in the nick of time he felt that luck was undoubtedly with them.

The question of roads had first to be settled, and when the route was decided upon silence fell between them. Questions occurred to Peter that he would have liked to ask his companion, but he put them aside. He had made up his mind to trust Hofer. Still, he could not keep out of his thoughts the district attorney's theory that Hofer and a subtle plot of revenge were at the bottom of the three mysteries they were seeking to solve. If it were true, as Fleming believed, that the ex-butler had lied about the time of his employer's death, why had he done so, if not to shield himself. Was he really in the government service? What if that, too, were a lie? It had been nothing short of foolhardy to take his word and rush off with him into the lonely Jersey countryside in the dead of night. Yet, foolhardy or not, with Garrison's fate in the balance it had not been possible to do otherwise.

Hofer stirred suddenly and looked up, and when he spoke his words seemed to be an answer to his companion's thoughts.

"I shall not ask you to take any risks tonight,

doctor. I shall leave you at a safe distance and go on alone, on foot. If Garrison is, as I believe, at the house, I shall get help from the town before —what's that light ahead?"

"I wonder," said Peter, peering intently down the road.

"It doesn't move."

"No."

"It's a car having trouble, I suppose."

"I suppose so."

They had met few automobiles since their swerve seaward into a section of country occupied almost wholly by summer homes and consequently deserted in winter. None had passed them for some time, and the empty road with its vacant houses and its stillness, unbroken save by the swish of the waves on the nearby beach, gave an impression of loneliness and desolation.

Unconsciously Peter slowed down as they approached the car which stood in the middle of their road with several dark forms busied about it.

"We can't stop to help, there isn't time," said Hofer. But the words were hardly spoken when one of the figures near the car detached itself and came toward them with upraised hand. "I'll just see what he wants," said Peter.

The man who had signalled came up to them as they stopped, on Peter's side and peered into his face before he spoke. He was a young man, his face half-hidden by his hat brim.

"Beg pardon, but we are in difficulties," he

said, speaking with a strong foreign accent. "We have in our auto a very sick man whom we are taking to the house of friends not far away. If you could give us a lift with him as far as you go on this road I should be greatly indebted to you. We can carry him from there."

"Certainly." The answer was Hofer's, and in a high-pitched voice unlike his own. "But please hurry."

"Thanks." The man wheeled at once to return to the other car.

"Pull up," said Hofer to Peter, in the same voice as before. Then under his breath: "That's Perez. Garrison is in the car. Be careful now and follow my lead."

"Perhaps it's a trick," whispered Peter.

"No, Perez is too stupid for that. Lucky for us, though, that he couldn't see me."

They stopped alongside the stalled machine and the transfer of Garrison's inert form, concealed by robes, was quickly made with the assistance of the other two men who composed Perez's party. Then, with an order to one of the men to remain to guard the disabled car, Perez stepped into the tonneau and the second man prepared to follow.

"Bad place for a man to wait alone at this time of night," said Hofer in his disguised voice, without looking around. "Better leave them both. We'll take you to the house. Your friend seems to be pretty sick."

It was obvious that Perez hesitated. The sug-

gestion could not have pleased him, but it was too reasonable to be rejected without rousing suspicion.

"You are very kind," he returned, somewhat brusquely, motioned the man at his side to join

the other, and closed the door.

The car started. With one eye on it, Peter kept the other on Hofer, waiting for what was to come. Hofer's head was bent to avoid scrutiny from behind. His right hand was in his pocket, gripping his automatic. From the dark bundle that was Garrison issued only stertorous breathing. Perez was perfectly still.

The road ran for a mile or two through unsettled land before they finally struck a crossroad.

"Turn here," directed Perez.

"Straight ahead," ordered Hofer, and on the word he started up, whirled about, and thrust his pistol in Perez' face. "Put up your hands, Perez," he said quietly.

The Brazilian's hands rose automatically, then his head shot out, staring. "Franz!" he exclaimed, taken aback. But the next moment he snapped with his old arrogance: "What's the meaning of this?"

"I guess you understand," replied the secret service man. "If you don't they'll explain in Washington."

Perez' answer was an oath, mere futile rage.

The car was stopped now while Peter, directed by Hofer, searched and disarmed their prisoner and adjusted handcuffs. The task was novel and unpleasant and he made quick work of it. Then he satisfied himself as to Garrison's condition. That done they resumed the journey back to the city.

"How about the men we left behind?" Peter whispered to Hofer.

"Mere tools," was the answer. "We already have more of that small fry than we want."

Hofer and Perez were deposited at the nearest New York police station. With his charge in safe hands, Hofer lingered for a parting word with Peter. After having thanked him for his help he said, glancing back at the unconscious form in the tonneau:

"You can tell Garrison for me that his troubles are over."

"But are they?" questioned Peter. "Perez went to the district attorney today and accused him of murdering Andrassy."

"Naturally."

"You mean—" Peter paused, staring at the inexpressive face before him. "You mean that Perez did it himself?"

"I wish to God he had!" replied Hofer, and turning went into the police station.

"I wish to God he had." The words rang in Peter's ears all the way uptown, not so much for what they seemed to imply, but because of the depth of feeling they had suddenly revealed. And he had thought Hofer incapable of feeling!

CHAPTER XXVII

A VERY SICK MAN

T was already growing light in the east when Garrison came out of his stupor to find himself in Peter's bed, with his host asleep beside him. The latter, however, awoke at his patient's first movement, and after that there was no more

sleep for either.

The events of the night were reviewed carefully, Garrison supplying the missing prelude, which was that Perez had appeared at the studio with an offer to help him escape before he should be arrested for murder. On a refusal of the offer the Brazilian had opened the door and admitted an accomplice, by whom Garrison was overpowered, his last recollection being of the fumes which had rendered him unconscious.

"Hofer told me to tell you that your troubles are over," Peter said in concluding his account of what happened afterwards.

"Then it isn't true that I'm to be arrested?"

"I know only what Hofer told me," Peter answered. He did not think it necessary to add anything about the former butler's later remark. That did not concern Garrison.

"You've saved me again, doctor," said the artist. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Well, I owe you a unique and thrilling experience, so we'll call it square," Peter said. "How are you feeling?"

"All right."

"You're still a little white about the gills. I prescribe a holiday, to begin with breakfast with Olive. I'll call up and tell her you're coming."

"You're to have a guest for breakfast," he announced to the girl a minute later when he had her on the wire.

"You, Peter? How lovely!" she answered.

"No, not me-your best young man."

"Tony? Why, what's happened?"

"Wonderful things. He'll tell you."

"Why don't you come too?"

"Couldn't think of it. It would make me lone-some."

She laughed. "Oh, Peter!"

"Fact. Wish I'd picked your star, Olive. You are lucky."

"If I am it's because you are you, Peter."

"Yes, because I am I, and you are you, and because Tony is Tony and the world's the world. Well—bless you, my children, and all that sort of thing."

"Why, Peter, what's the matter with you?

You sound positively lugubrious."

"Got green eyes."

. "Oh, Peter!"

He laughed. "Good-bye."

An hour later he sent Garrison off in his car to keep his tryst and he himself took up the day's work. He was not really envious of his friends' happiness, only hungry for his own, which overnight had taken on definite form. And when that which has been a vague dream becomes a definite desire all sorts of obstacles spring up.

But to a healthy, active mind obstacles are stimulating. As he went about his affairs, wondering where the lightning would strike next, deep within him plans were forming that had to do with no darker mystery than that of a young girl's heart, the most immediate project being to run out to Mrs. Ryan's that evening, if all went well meantime.

The morning passed, also the afternoon, without word from either Hofer or the district attorney. From the former he had expected some inquiry as to Garrison's condition; from the latter he expected he knew not what. Fleming must, he thought, have heard of Perez's arrest and would naturally wish to have his version of the affair. When, therefore, the afternoon wore away without a summons from the district attorney Peter called up and asked to see him. It had occurred to him as possible that Fleming had not heard of Perez' arrest, since that was a Federal case.

"Well, doctor, what's on your mind?" was the

district attorney's greeting when Peter entered his office.

"Heard about Perez?"

"His arrest, yes."

"Then you've seen Hofer?"

"Hofer?" Fleming sat up.

Peter explained, for all Fleming knew was that Federal agents had arrested Perez and taken him to Washington. "Hofer in the secret service?" he said at the end of Peter's report. "Does that give you any light on our puzzle, doctor?"

"No. Have there been no other develop-

ments?"

"We've identified the girl, that's all."

"Oh—you have?" murmured Peter, rather faintly.

"But we haven't got her yet. She's hiding, hasn't been home since Saturday night, the night of Kala's death, so the neighbors say. She lives with her father in a cheap West Side flat, and earns her living as an accompanist in a music school. Nothing much seems to be known of her acquaintance with Kala—must have been a secret affair. The people in the house seem to look upon her as a child and think she may have fallen into the hands of white slavers, or something of that kind. It was through one of them reporting her as missing that we got on her track. The police thought last night they had her as good as caught. They heard from the manager of a

moving picture place that he had engaged a young girl of her description to play the piano. But she didn't turn up—got wind of her danger, probably. However, she must be without money, so she can't go far. We ought to have her in a few days. And I'm anxious now to get hold of her. She is evidently seriously involved in the case or she wouldn't have run away."

"What does her father say?"

"Nothing. The poor devil's desperately ill, dying, his doctor says. A dope fiend in the last stages."

"A dope—" Peter swallowed his startled echo before it was fully out, and was thankful that it escaped his companion's notice.

"Here's the address," said Fleming, reading from a paper he picked up from his desk, "Paul Hamel, 796 West 118th Street. I wish you'd go up and have a look at him. The report is that he is unconscious and likely to die so. I'd be glad to have your opinion on that point, though the police are convinced that he knows nothing. He never speaks, they say, except to moan the girl's name—seems to know she's gone. Very sad case. Will you go up and see him?"

"Certainly," said Peter.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TRUTH AT LAST

A NURSE answered the bell of the Hamel apartment. At Peter's declaration that he came from the district attorney she led him down a narrow hallway to a bedroom where he found, as he had known he must, his patient of the Panharmonic concert.

What havor the intervening ten days had wrought! Peter did not need the nurse's chart to know the story it told of a swiftly failing pulse. All the signs of imminent death were in the white, unconscious face on the pillow.

"What does he say?" Peter asked as half articulated sounds came from the feeble lips.

"He's calling his daughter."

"What is it he says?"

"Her name, Carola."

The nurse offered no further information. Whatever she knew or thought she kept to herself. And Peter had no desire to question her. He was wondering what he ought to do. Passing into the small living-room he looked about. The furnishings were all old and worn, but there was an attractive simplicity about them, and an air

of having had in their time more congenial housing.

A grand piano filled one corner of the room, beside it there stood an overflowing music rack. Both piano and rack were old, but like everything else inoffensively so. On the walls were many framed photographs of men and women—musicians, all of them, judging from their costumes and the musical instruments that abounded.

"A mon cher ami, Paul Hamel, 1894," Peter read on one near him, but was unable to decipher the signature below.

In 1894 Paul Hamel had been a young man, a prosperous one, perhaps. What had brought him to such an end?

"Carola!"

The name, clearly spoken this time, and with a poignant insistence, resolved Peter doubts. He must bring the girl back. His decision made he lost no time, realizing that there was none to lose, and in little more than an hour he was at Mrs. Ryan's home.

The girl was at the gate when he reached it, and greeted him with a shy, warm little hand that sent a thrill through him.

"I knew you'd come," she said. "I was watching at the window. And Mrs. Ryan's made doughnuts."

"That's fine," he answered absently.

"You must be frozen. Let's hurry," she said,

slipping her hand back to her protecting coat pocket.

"Wait a minute." He buttoned her coat which was flying in the wind, then looking down into her eyes, "I have something to tell you—Carola," he said."

At her name her glance widened with alarm.

"You are Carola Hamel, aren't you?" he asked.

"How did you know?" she faltered.

"I'll tell you that later. First I must tell you about—your father."

The color fled from her lips. "My father?" she whispered.

"He is very sick," said Peter gently.

"Oh." Her tone sounded oddly relieved, but it was anxious enough as she asked: "Very sick?"

"I'm afraid he—isn't going to get well."

"Oh—what shall I do?" she cried.

"He asks for you, Carola—calls your name over and over."

"Oh-oh-"

"And—he isn't going to live till morning."

"Then I must go to him. We must hurry."

She turned to the car. "Hurry, please," she begged. "Don't wait for anything."

"I must explain to Mrs. Ryan and get you a coat."

"I'm warm enough. Oh, please hurry!"

But Peter continued his way to the house, re-

turning presently with a veil and coat for her. Then, with Mrs. Ryan's sympathetic farewells in

their ears they started.

Carola sat forward, watching the road and never speaking except to say again "Hurry—Oh hurry," when for any reason he slackened pace. She asked no questions and he refrained from questioning her, seeing that her whole mind was filled with the fear that she would be too late to see her father alive. Why had she left him then? Why had she said she had no father?

When they finally reached her home she was out of the car before it stopped and up the stairs without a word to Peter. He followed slowly, not wishing to intrude, yet feeling that in his professional capacity he might be needed. Finding the

door of the flat ajar he went softly in.

From the room where the sick man lay her voice could be heard in short, quick snatches of words, of which he caught only their tender cadence. Once the nurse spoke, and thinking she was perhaps protesting in behalf of quiet for the patient, he went forward to see what was happening. But he stopped again when he heard a man's low tones follow those of the nurse. The doctor in charge of the case was evidently there, he thought, and retreated to the living-room.

Here the voices reached him only faintly and he wandered about absently inspecting the photographs on the wall and hardly seeing what he looked at. He was thinking, wondering again. The dying man would certainly not last till morning, and when the end came, what then? The girl could not go away now, she must give herself up, tell what she knew. Her secrecy and flight had not been for her own sake, she had said. For whom, then?

"Doctor! Doctor!"

It was her voice and it sent Peter plunging through the narrow hall to her side.

"Oh, doctor!" She looked up at him piteously, then back at her father's still face. All was over. She read it in Peter's eyes and with a despairing cry sank beside the bed, sobbing.

Peter bent to raise her, but another's arms were ahead of his—Hofer's. It was his voice, not a doctor's, that Peter had heard.

"Pauvre enfant!" He commiserated the girl tenderly, lifting her to her feet and holding her close in his arms until her first flow of tears had spent itself. "Viens, cherie," he said then, and led her into an adjoining room, with "Just a minute, doctor," to Peter as they passed him.

Peter went back to the living-room to wait, leaving the nurse with the dead man, and in about ten minutes Hofer came to him there.

"He was my brother, doctor, as you may have guessed from the resemblance between us," began the secret-service man, in the calm, even tone that long practice in self-control had made second nature. "My real name is François Hamel. Now that my poor brother no longer lives I am free to speak the truth about Theodore Andrassy's death. He was the man responsible for it."

"Responsible?" repeated Peter, struck by the word. "Do you mean that he—killed him?"

"No, I should not put it in quite that way," answered Hamel. "However, with your permission I will defer my explanation until we can see the district attorney. I must explain to him and I wish you also to hear what I have to say. My niece has just told me what you did for her and how very kind you were. We shall not forget it, either of us, I assure you."

"She was so young and so frightened. I could not have done otherwise," Peter said.

"Being what you are, that is true," agreed the other gravely. "Permit me to say—as one who knows men well—that your qualities of heart are very rare and admirable."

"Thanks," returned Peter, much embarrassed by the formal compliment. "But when are we to see the district attorney?"

"At once. I telephoned an hour ago to Mr. Fleming and he said he would see me whenever I came, as it is necessary for me to go to Washington tonight. So if you are free now——'

"I am, and we can go down in my car. But—your niece—we can't leave her here alone—"

"The nurse is to stay."

"Have you no relatives, no friends, you can send for?"

"No—unfortunately. The nature of my work made it impossible for me to form social ties, and my poor brother's affliction caused Carola to shrink from people. I have wished to send her to boarding-school so that she might have a more normal life for a girl of her age, but she would not leave her father. Now she is willing to go, and I should like to ask your advice as to a proper school for her. But we can discuss this on our way."

The discussion was brief, for Peter knew just the school, one near New York, but in the country where the pupils had plenty of outdoor life. The daughter of one of his patients was there, a charming girl of Carola's age. It would be exactly the place for Carola. And—if Mr. Hamel wished—he would be very glad to keep in touch with her.

Mr. Hamel was most grateful for the offer and accepted it instantly. He should never forget Dr. Bennett's kindness, he affirmed warmly, to which Peter responded with equal ardor that he should be only too happy to be of service. And that was literally true.

The district attorney kept his promise to see Hamel at once, and the latter lost no time in beginning the story he had come to tell.

His task was not easy, but so composed was his

manner and so unhalting his speech that of the two listeners only Peter, who had had a glimpse beneath the calm surface that he showed the world, realized the effort the disclosure must have cost him.

"With your permission," he began formally, "I shall tell you a little of my brother's life. It is only fair to him to do so, for it will explain, perhaps excuse, what he did. We were born in England of French parentage. Our family was one of education but small means, and when Paul showed a remarkable talent for the piano every resource was devoted to developing it. Success came with his first concert, unfortunately. If he had not had that taste of fame and flattery his whole life might have been different. Having had it he could not face a future without it. He broke his right hand in a fall while skating, and when it healed he found that it had stiffened in such a way as to affect his use of it. He had, in short, to give up all thought of a public career.

"The blow was terrible. We thought at first that he would lose his reason, but from that he was saved by the devotion of his wife. They lived in London where he gave piano lessons, and where his daughter was born. By degrees he became accustomed to his lot as an obscure musician and we hoped he was also becoming reconciled. But that he never was, as his wife knew. When she died—the next blow fate dealt him—I chanced to

be in London, and shortly before the end she confided to me that he sometimes took morphine and she was fearful of the habit growing upon him.

"Her fears were justified. I did what I could, so did poor little Carola, then about thirteen; but this second loss seemed to leave him nothing to live for and he went downhill rapidly.

"About that time I became interested in some diamond smuggling that was baffling the United States secret-service and I gave up my work in London and came over here to lend a hand. I had run up against a shady enterprise of Theodore Andrassy's while on a case in Brazil and felt that I had a possible key to the smuggling here. I brought my brother and niece with me, hoping the change of environment would benefit him.

"All this, however, has nothing to do with what we are discussing, except that had I not been Andrassy's butler and in the house at the time of his death, I should now know no more than you what killed him. My discovery was an accident. His death indeed was an accident—his and Zarady's. My brother did not intend their deaths, only Kala's."

"And why Kala's?" asked Fleming.

"His motive was mixed, as most motives are," replied Hamel. "The psychology is simple, however. He envied Kala his success. Kala had everything he had lost, and now was about to

rob him of the one thing left, his child. And Kala did not want her honorably—there was that fear, too. He had promised to marry her, she considered herself engaged, but he insisted on secret meeting, because his career would be ruined, he said, if Zarady heard of the affair."

"How had she made his acquaintance?"

"Through a singing teacher at whose studio she played accompaniments. It was his music and success that fascinated her, which was natural enough, brought up as she had been. Her father's protests had no effect. She had watched over him and mothered him until he seemed to her more like a child than a parent. And I saw her so rarely; the nature of my work made it necessary to conceal from them even where I lived. Then her sensitiveness about her father's condition made her shrink from possible friends. Altogether, her life was such as to make her very mature in some ways, very immature in others. I do not feel that she can be blamed for what happened."

"Certainly not," put in Peter eagerly.

"When Zarady died," continued Hamel. "I suspected Andrassy of being concerned in it, just how I don't know. But Kala's death puzzled me. I had no suspicion of the truth, though I knew my niece had been in his rooms because I found her boa there. It was I who hid it under the sofa. There was no time to do more than that,

for just as I recognized it and picked it up I heard people coming. I hoped to be able to take it away later. I thought of going to see her that night but did not dare, for fear of being followed. I had an idea that Dr. Bennett suspected me." He looked at Peter. "I fancied you stared at me when the telephone operator mentioned the fur cap that Carola had on," he explained.

"Did I?" murmured Peter. And all the time he had thought it was Hamel who stared.

"That was Saturday night," Hamel went on. "The next evening Andrassy died."

"The next evening?" said Fleming. "I thought so."

"It happened shortly after dinner, in the musicroom. I found him there about ten o'clock when I went in to see if the windows were fastened."

"And you took him upstairs on the elevator and put him to bed?"

"Yes. I knew then that my brother was responsible for his death. After arranging the body in the bed I went to him. He was in a dreadful state, phsically and mentally. Carola had left him; he had not seen her since the previous evening. He had told her that Kala would not live through the Andrassy concert, and, terrified by his wild words and manner, she had gone to warn Kala. That was what took her to his apartment, after she had failed to find him at Andrassy's. This I have just learned from her."

"She knew then that her father had killed Kala?"

"Yes, but not how death was caused."

"How was death caused?" asked Fleming, and both he and Peter leaned forward for the reply.

"In a most unusual way. You know, probably, that concert pianists are nearly always under contract to some piano maker to use only his make of piano. It is an advertisement for which the manufacturer pays according to the pianist's fame, and he furnishes an instrument whenever it is needed. My poor brother tuned pianos for the Steiner Company. It was all he was fit for, owing to the curse of morphine, and after the piano for Kala was sent to Panharmonic Hall he went there and tuned it. That done, no one was permitted to touch it but Kala, and if the concert had taken its regular course that evening Kala would have died, and Zarady and Andrassy would be alive today. They had the misfortune to use pianes meant only for Kala, Zarady to play for Miss Thrace's encore, as you know, and Andrassy to amuse himself for a few minutes after dinner. He asked me for the key, which my brother had left with the footman, and I gave it to him, suspecting nothing."

"Your brother did not know that you were at

Andrassy's?"

"No, and when the footman reported to me that the piano tuner had come I, of course, kept out of his way. That evening, at the concert, the Steiner piano was not used, and it was a mere whim that made Andrassy wish to try it the next evening. I heard him playing as I cleared the dinner table, and noticed that he stopped suddenly, but thought nothing of it. Afterwards, not seeing him about, I supposed he had gone out. Then, as I have said, when I went to the music room to see about the windows I found him there dead. He lay between the piano bench and the piano. It was when I was bending over him that I chanced to look at the keyboard and noticed that one of the keys was pressed down, caught by something."

Hamel paused, and while his hearers waited impatiently he put his hand into an inside pocket of his coat, with the deliberation of movement characteristic of him, and took out a small box. Opening it, he held it out.

"This is what I found after removing the key-board," he said."

Fleming took the box from him. Within lay a tiny rubber bulb with a needle in one end.

"A sort of home-made hypodermic syringe?" said he.

"Yes," replied Hamel. "The bulb is small enough to fit into the space under the piano keys, and the needle was between two of the white keys which concealed it. But when the player pressed either of those two keys the needle stuck him, and the bulb, squeezed by the pressure on the key

above, emptied into his finger, through the needle, a drop of the poison it contained—hydrocyanic acid."

"Is that possible, doctor," Fleming asked of Peter. "Could death be caused instantaneously

by such means?"

"Undoubtedly," Peter answered. "One drop in the blood and death would result instantly—or one whiff, for that matter. Let me tell you something that happened in a college laboratory where a friend of mine was studying. The professor came in and asked one of the students, whom he found working under a hood, what he was doing, and before the student could answer, the professor bent his head and took a sniff, and dropped dead. That is what hydrocyanic acid will do."

"But Kala's case must have been different," said Fleming. "He was not playing the piano at the time; he was in his bedroom."

"Yes, but in his bedroom there was a clavier, a silent keyboard that musicians sometimes use for the practice of technique. Kala's looked like a miniature organ. You must have noticed it standing against the wall beside his chiffonier. Death was not instantaneous in his case, I think, for he evidently tried to get to the 'phone to call help. It was by means of the clavier that my brother first meant to kill Kala. There was, he thought, practically no chance of anybody else

using it; and one day when he was tuning Kala's piano and was left alone he inserted his device in the clavier. When nothing came of it he concluded that Kala did not use the clavier and decided on a bolder scheme, that which resulted in Zarady's death. Made desperate by that outcome, and knowing he had not long to live, he took the first chance that offered, the Andrassy concert. He could not, he told me, die without saving his child from Kala. That is the excuse I have to offer for him. He was not really sane. And now, what do you mean to do?"

"About what you have told me?" said Fleming.
"Nothing. Your brother is dead. To give his story to the world would only bring suffering upon you and his daughter. To conceal it will harm nobody. Besides, you have, I think, earned some reward for your services to this country."

Fleming turned to Peter. "You have probably not yet heard, doctor," he said "that thanks to Mr. Hamel's intelligence and persistence, Andrassy has been proved to have been the brains of a group of diamond smugglers operating between this country and South America. Several of the bunch were caught and convicted about two years ago, you may recall, but it soon became apparent that they were only small fry, that the big fish were still at work. Andrassy was the biggest, as Perez has confessed since his arrest.

So I think you will agree with me that you and I will only be paying our country's debt in keeping silence about matters that concern Mr. Hamel and his niece, and nobody else."

That Peter agreed to this goes without saying.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHORT AND SWEET

A FORTNIGHT later, in the reception room of a private school for young girls on the banks of the beautiful Hudson River, Peter Bennett and Carola Hamel stood together one afternoon, looking out of the window at a charming picture made by a group of girls on horseback, just in from a gallop. Brilliant young color flamed in every cheek and laughing voices floated to the ears of the watchers.

Peter's eyes returned to the girl at his side, so

pathetic to him in her black dress.

"The next time I come to see you," he said, "I want you to have red cheeks like that. Is your riding habit almost ready?"

"When will the next time be?" she questioned

eagerly.

"Is your habit almost ready?" he repeated.

"Yes, yes," she said. "When will you come again?"

"Well,"—smiling down at her teasingly—"that

depends on how good you are."

"I'll be good," she promised. "When will you come?"

"Next week, perhaps, if I can," he answered. "But now I must go." He took her hand, and because the touch of it made him a little self-conscious, he added at once: "Get them to hurry up your riding things. I want you to get out of doors and have some fun."

"How long am I to stay here?" she asked.

"Oh—until you've learned everything in all your books."

She smiled at his banter. "And then may I go back to New York and play accompaniments, as I used to?" she inquired seriously.

"Certainly not."

"What am I to do, then?"

"We'll have to talk that over with your uncle."
"He said I was to do whatever you told me."

"Well—we'll see. Perhaps by that time you'll have found somebody—some young man—that you like better than your uncle—or me—and——"

"I'll never like anybody better than you."
Her fingers tightened on his, as if fearful of losing him.

He looked down gravely into her frank eyes, without a hint of coquetry in them, and decided that Hamel had been right about her. It had been Kala's music and fame that had attracted her. She was still only a child.

Nevertheless, her words sang in his memory all the way back to New York, and his hand tingled at the recollection of her quick, anxious pressure. Not much to feed hope on, perhaps, but he was content with it, for a beginning.

And now, three years later, it is betraying no secret to say that his hope was justified. It was a good beginning and the end has been—well, the right one.









